THE REDEMPTION OF PHYSICAL REALITY
FILMS FROM THE BERLIN SCHOOL THROUGH THE LENS OF SIEGFRIED KRACAUER'S MATERIAL AESTHETICS

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PhD in German Studies

Abstract

This thesis explores the contemporaneity of Siegfried Kracauer's conception of cinema as outlined in his book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, first published in 1960, and defined by Kracauer as a study of "material aesthetics." Though the book is often seen solely as a contribution, albeit a significant one, to so-called classical film theory, in this study I want to make the case for the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's notion of the medium, presenting ways of making his approach productive for the examination of contemporary cinema. As case studies, I have chosen films associated with the Berlin School, a group of contemporary German filmmakers whose material realism strikes me as ideally suited for discussions in relation to Kracauer's material aesthetics.

This is what I aim to do in this study: bringing together Kracauer's idea of cinema's redemptive potential for re-experiences of the material world with contemporary realist filmmaking. However, I do not consider *Theory of Film* a dogmatic manual of cinematic realism but an open text that raises significant issues about the medium's relationship with reality. Thus, rather than aiming to prove Kracauer's film theory right or wrong, I want to use the book as a toolbox to think about contemporary cinema and the current possibilities for experiences of reality. In so doing, this study, I hope, will help to open up a discussion on the relevance of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* for current realist approaches not only in the Berlin School films that are my object, but in world cinema.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the contemporaneity of Siegfried Kracauer's conception of cinema as outlined in his book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, first published in 1960, and defined by Kracauer as a study of "material aesthetics." Though the book is often seen solely as a contribution, albeit a significant one, to so-called classical film theory, in this study I want to make the case for the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's notion of the medium, presenting ways of making his approach productive for the examination of contemporary cinema. As case studies, I have chosen films associated with the Berlin School, a group of contemporary German filmmakers whose material realism strikes me as ideally suited for discussions in relation to Kracauer's material aesthetics.

Chapter 1 is intended to introduce Kracauer's material aesthetics, as well as contextualise his approach both historically and within current debates. Throughout *Theory of Film*, Kracauer develops the central argument that cinema has the unique potential for (re-)experiences of the material world, a claim which, I suggest, rests on two main foundations: first, on an idea of photographic media's genuine relationship with reality and, second, on the sensory and somatic nature of film spectatorship. In the book's epilogue, moreover, the medium's exclusive properties and possibilities are situated within broader questions. Identifying a crisis of human experience under the conditions of modernity, Kracauer suggests that cinema may be a way to regain a closer relationship with reality. In this sense, the film experience partakes in the shaping of human subjectivity. However, for Kracauer the medium's ability to render visible physical reality is not simply given but needs to be achieved; it requires a strong adherence to the material world on the part of the filmmaker.

The second chapter aims to familiarise us with a group of German directors who have become known as the Berlin School, as a way of prefacing closer analyses of selected films associated with this group in the following chapters. In the first part of the chapter, I give a brief history of the term 'Berlin School,' from its origins in German film reviews at the beginning of the 21st century to the most recent scholarship on the directors. Furthermore, I examine the predominating themes and questions in writings on Berlin School cinema and, in doing so, explain my take on the film(maker)s' approaches. Regardless of differences, I suggest that common features of the selected

Berlin School films consist of a particular use of physical reality, which predestines them for questions of the contemporary relevance of Kracauer's material conception of the medium.

While the first two chapters are of an introductory nature, the following three chapters examine significant characteristics of Berlin School cinema in relation to Kracauer's material aesthetics. In these three chapters, the focus lies on the analysis of the following six films: Angela Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001), Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* (2005), Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (2006), Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002) and Christoph Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt* (2010). In addition to my analysis of film sequences, I take into account statements from the directors in order to highlight their attitudes to the medium and its relation to the material world.

Chapter 3 explores the Berlin School films' adherence to the material world with regard to their employment of camerawork, lighting and sound. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer understands physical reality as at once given and constructed; not only can it be recorded by the camera but also needs to be revealed by cinematic techniques and devices. Kracauer's two-fold (preserving and constructing) conception, I suggest, is also reflected in Berlin School cinema's approaches to the material world. While on the one hand we can observe what critics have described as a proscription of manipulation (of pro-filmic reality and the spectator), the directors' "reflective realism" is characterised, on the other hand, by a strong awareness of form, "a conscious rendering and modification of theoretically and film historically derived methods."[1] Crucially, both Kracauer's conception of the medium and the Berlin School filmmakers' practice are aimed at rendering the material phenomena (re-)presented in filmic images and sounds indeterminate (in order to support the associative nature of the film experience).

The ambiguous character of the material world as well as the Berlin School filmmakers' aspirations to find 'appropriate' modes of representation also play a central role in chapter 4 and 5. In the fourth chapter, I take Kracauer's claim for cinema's purely external qualities, its clinging to the surface of things—referring to both human and non-human objects—, as a starting point for Berlin School cinema's approaches to the human being. In stark contrast to psychological practices of realism, Berlin School films, I

[1] Michael Baute et al., "The Berlin School—A Collage," *Senses of Cinema* 55 (September 2010), http://sensesofcinema.com/2010/feature-articles/the-berlin-school-—-a-collage-2/.

suggest, draw attention to the ambiguous corporeality of human characters—"objects among objects," as suggested by Kracauer—and present them as opaque strangers whom we are allowed to get to know, but only to a certain extent. This strangeness (or ambiguity) around the human characters is achieved by a combination of strategies, including a restrained performance mode (influenced by Robert Bresson), the downplaying of explanatory language and the near eschewal of facial close-ups.

The final chapter pays attention to the importance of the spatial environment in Berlin School cinema. Here, I start with two further aspects of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*: first, his concern with non-dramatic and peripheral elements in narrative cinema and, secondly, his emphasis on the medium's potential to render our familiar surroundings unfamiliar. The de-dramatising approach of many Berlin School films favours the integration of such elements without a (clear) narrative function, and particularly the extended display of locations. Instead of renowned places, however, Berlin School films orientate themselves towards the everyday spaces habitually overlooked in cinematic representations, the kind of public spaces which often lack clear singularity (conceived of by Marc Augé as non-places). Moreover, the films often allow us only rather narrowly framed views of the surroundings, thus confronting us with fragments of spatial reality rather than the world as a whole. As a result of the absence of landmarks and the way the spatial environment is filmed, locations maintain a degree of (non-sinister) mysteriousness, akin to the films' ambiguity around the human figures, and reveal the unfamiliar in the familiar of our present-day surroundings.

As we can see, chapters 3 to 5 serve the main purpose of this study: bringing together Kracauer's idea of cinema's redemptive potential to render visible the material world with contemporary realist filmmaking. Berlin School cinema is particularly suitable for my investigation because of the directors' shared preoccupation, analogous to Kracauer's, with physical reality. As I will demonstrate, the selected films render visible, audible and sensible the socially defined material world we live in and, in so doing, they make us re-see, re-listen, and thus re-experience this world. In this sense, my take on the Berlin School distinguishes itself from others by foregrounding the films' proximity to Kracauer's material aesthetics. This study, I hope, will therefore help to open up a discussion on the relevance of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* for current realist approaches not only in the Berlin School films that are my object, but in world cinema.

1 The Redemption of Siegfried Kracauer's Material Aesthetics

> the cinema […] in the perspective of something more general—an approach to the world, a mode of human existence.
>
> SIEGFRIED KRACAUER[2]

As outlined in the introduction, the theoretical focal point of this study is Siegfried Kracauer's conception of cinema, and particularly his volume *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. This book, defined by Kracauer as a "material aesthetics," was written during the late 1940s and the 1950s in his New York exile and first published in 1960, yet its origins can be traced back even further. In the difficult months of 1940/41 that he and his wife, Elisabeth "Lili" Ehrenreich, spent in Marseille, waiting anxiously for an opportunity to escape Nazi-occupied France and emigrate to the United States, Kracauer first outlined his project of a material film aesthetics (known as the Marseille notebooks), drafts which over the next twenty years would gradually turn into the monograph *Theory of Film*. Though often seen solely as a contribution, albeit a significant one, to so-called classical film theory, in this study I want to make the case for the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's notion of the medium, presenting ways of making his approach productive for the examination of contemporary cinema.

Over the last two decades, one can observe a renewed interest in key thinkers associated with classical film theory. In this context, Kracauer's *Theory of Film* has been reevaluated, alongside other seminal yet long overlooked texts by Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs and Jean Epstein, among others, who in various ways helped to define the specifics of the filmic medium (and distinguish it from the traditional arts). These recent reappraisals of several proponents of classical film theory can be understood as a response to the fundamental transformations in cinema triggered by the medium's digitisation. As a result of these ongoing changes on the level of (post)production, distribution, exhibition and perception, numerous certainties relating to film, and consequently, Film Studies have been thrown into doubt, and especially the notion of the medium's indexical relationship with reality. The return to the discipline's 'classics'

[2] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), li.

has therefore been seen as beneficial for current attempts to reflect on cinema's changing condition.

The rediscovery of Kracauer's work, and in particular his writings on cinema, becomes apparent in the numerous monographs and collected essays that have been published in the last five years alone, offering considerations of both historic and present issues.[3] In addition to these recent publications, scholars' engagement with Kracauer's film theory is also shown by international conferences such as *Where Is Frankfurt Now?* at the Goethe University in Frankfurt (August 2014) or *Errettung oder Erlösung der Wirklichkeit? Film, Geschichte und Politik bei Siegfried Kracauer* at the International Research Center for Cultural Studies in Vienna (March 2016), symposia which explored the contemporaneity of approaches to cinema from thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (with several panels focussing largely on Kracauer) and Kracauer's reflections on film and history, respectively.

Thomas Elsaesser, too, has recently noted the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*. In his essay "Siegfried Kracauer's affinities," Elsaesser examines Kracauer's book with regard to cinema's changing condition and associates his conceptions with those of (more) contemporary film theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell, and particularly Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy, suggesting that Kracauer's notion of the medium's inherent affinities prefigured "the broader ontological concerns that in recent decades have revived and revitalised thinking about the cinema."[4] From today's perspective, he argues, these affinities—The Unstaged, The Fortuitous, Endlessness, The Indeterminate and The 'Flow of Life'—, "speak to many of our current concerns—with 'flow' and 'the open,' with 'contingency' and 'indeterminacy,' with 'nonlinear causality' and 'Nachträglichkeit' (deferred action), with

[3] Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke, eds., *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012); Siegfried Kracauer, *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Drehli Robnik, Amália Kerekes, and Katalin Teller, eds., *Film als Loch in der Wand: Kino und Geschichte bei Siegfried Kracauer* (Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2013); Graeme Gilloch, *Siegfried Kracauer: Our Companion in Misfortune* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015); Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[4] Thomas Elsaesser, "Siegfried Kracauer's Affinities," *NECSUS* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 13.

the 'infinite' and the 'indefinite.'"[5] For Elsaesser, "this apparent topicality and […] the sort of retroactive prescience […] makes Kracauer 'one of us.'"[6] As he further suggests,

> Kracauer's affinities, understood not only in the context of a phenomenologically-inflected aesthetics of realism or as a covert manifesto supporting the modern cinema of the time-image, can provide a positive/negative foil for the moving image in its current condition, where art and life tend to change places and where the contingent, the endless (as the serial) and indeterminate (as risk calculus) have become the basis for extracting from images "useful" information and "usable data."[7]

Starting from the issue of medium specificity, Elsaesser poses the question whether the specific characteristics of cinema are related to the material/technological properties of the recording process (photography/celluloid), or rather, inherent to the medium ("indexing time and capturing matter in motion") regardless of the actual material/technology used by the filmmaker. This latter, "'expanded view' of medium specificity is one that Rosalind Krauss has defended as the 'post-medium condition,' and it is one," he argues, "that allows us to consider Kracauer's affinities as compatible with digital media, and thus—despite appearances—not circumscribed by the photographic ontology."[8] In other words, the contemporaneity of Kracauer's approach lies in offering an ontology of cinema that goes beyond the notion of film as a photographic medium; in this way, the ideas presented by Kracauer in *Theory of Film* have not become obsolete by the medium's digitisation. The redemption of physical reality—the book's principal thesis (and subtitle)—results from the automatism of the camera, a conviction which, according to Elsaesser, is not only central to Kracauer's book but also forms part of numerous ontological reflections on the medium:

> It captures the phenomena of the world without the interference of the human mind and thus, for the first time in history, is able to store time as the medium of change, of becoming, of transformation, and of possibility, but also records the thereness of things and the presence of human beings in their transient singularity and evanescent particularity. We find a version of this redemptive power of automatism in technical images in many philosophically-inclined thinkers on the cinema: from Jean Epstein's photogénie to Bazin's ontology of the photographic image; from Cavell's consolation that the cinema shows the world to us as it is, without requiring our presence in it, to Deleuze's conviction that the cinema returns to us a liberating exteriority, multiplicity, and

[5] Ibid., 6.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 15.
[8] Ibid., 7.

> immanence. The view that the cinema's automatism is a value in itself is also shared by Rancière and Nancy.[9]

As Elsaesser aptly observes, this emphasis on the medium's automatic character is diametrically opposed to Rudolf Arnheim's view of cinema's aesthetic qualities as analogous to the traditional arts, outlined in his 1932 book *Film as Art*, in which he rejects the assertion of film's mechanical nature and its close relationship with reality. However, in an article from 1993 Arnheim reconsiders his position in relation to Kracauer's, suggesting that cinema, like all figurative arts, is constituted through "two kinds of authenticity."[10] These two authenticities are seen to reside in the interplay of nature (first) and human experience (second); in other words, the medium's proximity to the pre-existing world (by means of mechanical reproduction), as emphasised by Kracauer, on the one hand, and the artistic shaping of this material, as stressed by the early Arnheim, on the other. Yet, in the same article Arnheim predicts that digitisation may push the medium towards a higher degree of expressive, and increasingly, manipulative, interventions by the filmmaker. And indeed, digitisation has undoubtedly heightened the possibility of manipulating images to an extent that film's accidental qualities, as highlighted in Kracauer's notion of inherent affinities, have weakened, if not vanished (especially in mainstream cinema). With regard to these substantial transformations, "one would therefore need to consider," as Elsaesser points out, "whether the 'mechanically-programmed' image is closer to the 'automatism' of Kracauer or to the 'expressive artist' of Arnheim."[11] However, as I argue in this thesis, the well-established opposition between Arnheim's constructivist view of film art, and the automatist view imputed to Kracauer, needs to be (partly) reconsidered.

While the medium's digital turn is not the primary concern of this study, questions of cinema's relationship with reality are addressed at length. As outlined in the introduction, my thesis examines the ongoing relevance of Kracauer' notion of the medium's redemptive potential, or more precisely, its applicability to realist approaches in contemporary cinema by looking at films associated with the Berlin School, a group of German directors who continue to shoot largely on film. They represent a faction in present-day cinema who—whether using analogue or digital technology—keep the

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[9] Ibid., 15–16.
[10] Rudolf Arnheim, "The Two Authenticities of the Photographic Media," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 537–40.
[11] Elsaesser, "Siegfried Kracauer's Affinities," 12.

manipulation of reality and the recorded material to a minimum, and despite being partly highly stylised and constructed, the films draw on the medium's contingencies and the indeterminate nature of opaque images and sounds. Berlin School cinema can be regarded, I suggest, as material filmmaking. As Tina Kaiser has described the directors' attitude to reality,

> In all diesen Filmen als großartigen Leerlauffilmen von Handlung […] passiert, was an handlungstreibenden Vorgängen geschieht oder geschehen könnte, im Off—und dergestalt auch im Off der kadrierten Räume. Einzig die Umgebung, die Räume und dergestalt auch die Architektur, die Natur, die Bäume, die Gräser und der Wind sind hier im permanenten On. […] Diese Filme verweisen also in ihr eigenes Off. Die Repräsentationen machen somit ihr Gegenteil bewusst, die Realität—und ihre Übersetzung in Bilder: Im zeitgenössischen deutschen Kino geschieht dabei das andere Raumdurchschreiten oder schlicht: das materielle Filmen.[12]

Kaiser's argument about Berlin School cinema's concentration on the material world is accurate insofar as the films' narrative austerity gives precedence to the observation of the spatial surroundings and, one could add here, human characters. By the focus on the environment, Berlin School films invite us to experience anew well-known aspects of our daily lives. 'Materielles Filmen,' however, is not an entirely German phenomenon but can be found in different contemporary approaches worldwide including the films of Lucrecia Martel (Argentina), Kelly Reichardt (United States) and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand). Yet, what makes Berlin School cinema distinctive is the group's network character, which becomes apparent in numerous creative affiliations among the filmmakers (including cinematographers, editors etc.), their recurrent exchange of ideas and shared concerns. Moreover, the Berlin School, as recognised by the 2013 group retrospective at the Museum of Modern Arts in New York, can be considered one of the most significant cinematic movements in recent time, both heavily influenced by and influencing international filmmakers.

This study draws largely on textual analysis of six key films from different Berlin School directors: Angela Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001), Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* (2005), Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (2006), Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002) and Christoph Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt* (2010). These films have been selected for two main reasons: first, their shared capacity for

[12] Tina Hedwig Kaiser, "Arbeit mit Fragmenten: Bild und Raum in den Filmen der Berliner Schule" (Berliner Experimentalfilmwochen 2010 der ETH Zürich, Aedes Campus Berlin, March 23, 2010).

moments of material redemption; and second, the coexistence of a strong phenomenological attentiveness to the material world, on the one hand, and the films' formal construction, on the other; hence, a practice of realist filmmaking that can be described as both material and form-conscious. Indeed, the importance attributed by Berlin School directors to finding an appropriate form (mode of representation) cannot be highlighted enough.

Yet despite their common principles and strategies, I am far from proclaiming the homogeneity of Berlin School films; rather, one can find very diverse, and sometimes even contradictory, attitudes to physical reality—from *Sehnsucht*'s more conventional mode(s) of realism to *Marseille*'s rather modernist and fragmentary style. My case studies have been chosen in such a way as to provide a wide range of aesthetic approaches within what I consider a shared sensibility in relation to the material world; they are, both as a result of their similarities and their differences, particularly suitable for the purpose of this study, which is to discuss broader questions of the relationship between filmic images (and sounds) and pro-filmic reality with reference to the principal arguments outlined in *Theory of Film*. In this context, other directors associated with the Berlin School (Maren Ade, Benjamin Heisenberg etc.) have been left out as their films, for different reasons, seem to me less related to Kracauer's notion of material redemption.

Both essential aspects of Berlin School cinema—its concentration on the material world as well as the directors' self-conscious use of aesthetic strategies and formal choices in approaching this world—will be analysed in detail in the chapters 3, 4 and 5. Here, in discussions of the ambiguities of represented reality, the opacity of human characters and the (un)familiarity of (non-)places, the emphasis lies on the close examination of the chosen key films, and particularly on central sequences in these films. Through an engagement with specific moments, this study directly relates to Kracauer's approach in *Theory of Film*, both in terms of content and methodology. Throughout the book, Kracauer's textual analysis focusses on particular shots or parts of shots, and in so doing, stresses the significance of peripheral minutiae and transitory moments. This accentuation, however, is not singular to Kracauer, as Christian Keathley suggests in *Cinephilia and History*, pointing to the great importance cinephiles have ascribed to contingent, marginal details within filmic images. For Keathley, such ephemeral fragments can be considered "cinephiliac moments," if one understands

cinephilia as a mode of spectatorship which is "mobilized by discovery of what has been captured unexpectedly." [13] Moreover, "[t]his emphasis on the fragmentary image-moment," he points out,

> is a reminder that films are themselves made up of fragments: framing that shows us only a portion of the real space of an action, and editing that does likewise with time, allowing us to see only what the director deems necessary. […] By fetishizing certain shots or certain actions within shots, the cinephile reminds us of, and asks us to consider anew, the fragmentary quality of all films, also reminding us of certain the inherently fragmentary nature of the filmmaking process.[14]

While Keathley draws attention to the various degrees of a fragmentary quality in film that is both under and beyond the filmmaker's control, I want to turn back to Kracauer's and this study's particular interest in specific moments. In fact, Kracauer's principal thesis about cinema's potential for experiences of the material world—the redemption of physical reality—is linked to minor details and transitory fragments rather than films as a whole; thus, one could say that reality can only be redeemed in specific filmic moments. In *Theory of Film*, such redemptive moments relate to manifestations of material phenomena of all kinds—both human and non-human. These include for instance the display of the protagonist's hand or an (opaque) face, the wind in the leaves of a tree, a view of the ocean or a windmill. What these fleeting impressions of physical reality have in common, in Kracauer's view, is their ambiguity in meaning and the fact that they are only loosely connected with the story. The idea that cinema's redemptive potential manifests itself in specific moments becomes apparent also in Kracauer's description of a scene from the first film he saw as a little boy, which made a long-lasting impact on him:

> What thrilled me so deeply was an ordinary suburban street, filled with lights and shadows which transfigured it. Several trees stood about, and there was in the foreground a puddle reflecting invisible house façades and a piece of the sky. Then a breeze moved the shadows and the façades with the sky below began to waver. The trembling upper world in the dirty puddle—this image has never left me.[15]

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[13] Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 39.
[14] Ibid., 38–39.
[15] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, li.

This passage from the preface to *Theory of Film* can be seen as highly emblematic for Kracauer's reflective idea of cinema, since it points to the medium's transformative nature. In this allegorical image, the pro-filmic world is not merely reproduced but 'transfigured' by means of lights and shadows, reflections and distortions; and it is precisely the difference between natural phenomena and their mediated representation on screen which, in Kracauer's view, constitutes cinema's magical reification. This notion of transfiguration is deeply linked to Kracauer's argument about film's revelatory power. In *Theory of Film*, he recurrently stresses the medium's ability to render the world strange, suggesting that "the main interest lies not with corroborative imagery but with images which question our notion of the physical world."[16] For Kracauer, the medium's redemptive and de-familiarising possibilities arise not only from the camera's technological capacity but are also a result of the filmmaker's aesthetic strategies and stylistic choices. Unlike André Bazin, he does not champion particular cinematic techniques. The filmmaker's impact with regard to cinematography, editing etc. is acknowledged—sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—throughout the book, coming to the fore, for instance, in discussions of Jean Vigo's use of uncommon camera angles, or the employment of close-ups in the films of D. W. Griffith. However, Kracauer identifies tensions that arise within the feature film, referring to inherent conflicts between the camera's mechanical registration of pro-filmic reality and the director's creative arrangements, as well as between the overall narrative structure and fragmentary moments without a clear function for the story. And even though Kracauer advocates the film(maker)'s engagement with the material world, he considers these frictions essential for the medium.

As we can see, Kracauer's distinction between cinema's realist and formative elements can be linked back to Arnheim's two authenticities. In fact, the dialectics between the camera's mechanical registration and human intervention are expressed even more explicitly in Kracauer's later book *History*, where he applies his notion of photographic media's realist and formative tendencies to the field of historiography: "One might say that the historian follows two tendencies—the realistic tendency which prompts him to get hold of all data of interest, and the formative tendency which requires him to explain the material in hand. He is both passive and active, a recorder

[16] Ibid., 306.

and a creator."[17] Elsaesser is therefore right when he places Kracauer in the tradition of ontological reflections emphasising "the mutual interdependence of art and life in cinema as *each other's* promise of redemption."[18] And yet, crucially for this study, Kracauer also stressed, perhaps more than any other thinker, the fundamental differences between the traditional arts and the filmic medium as an "art with a difference."[19]

This first chapter, then, is intended to make us familiar with Kracauer's material aesthetics as conceptualised in *Theory of Film*. I therefore examine what can be considered the book's key concepts and subjects, as well as locate Kracauer's idea of cinema both historically and within current debates. Kracauer's central argument, which is that film has a unique potential for (re-)experiences of the material world rests, I suggest, on two main foundations: first, on a conception of photographic media's genuine relationship with physical reality and, second, of the sensory and somatic nature of cinematic spectatorship. These constitute, one might say, the book's ontological and epistemological basis.

Film's peculiar bond with reality is explained as resulting from its photographic nature. This is understood as the camera's capacity to render visible the material world, termed by Kracauer its "recording" and "revealing functions." In Kracauer's view, photographic media's technical properties allow for penetrations of the physical world that both resemble and estrange this world. Indeed, the significance of photographic media's ability to alienate the spectator and make her/him see the world anew cannot be highlighted enough. The relative unintentionality of the recording process, its independence from human control, he further argues, makes photography, and particularly film, open to contingencies and multiple meanings, a fact which distinguishes them fundamentally from the traditional arts; hence, cinema can be considered an "art with a difference."[20]

Yet, Kracauer's emphasis on film's exclusive potential does not only rely on its recording and revealing qualities. Apart from characteristics related to the process of recording, the possibilities of the medium are also understood as resulting from the

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[17] Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 47.
[18] Elsaesser, "Siegfried Kracauer's Affinities," 18.
[19] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 302.
[20] Ibid., l.

peculiarities of film perception. For Kracauer, filmic images affect the spectator primarily on a sensory and somatic level. In addition, the cinematic experience contains a strong imaginative element. Thanks to the dream-like character of filmic images, he suggests, the phenomena on screen freely interconnect with the spectator's personal memories and fantasies. Thus, Kracauer's notion of embodied spectatorship is not only a further element of his material aesthetics but is just as essential as the medium's recording and revealing qualities. In fact, both components have to be thought of as deeply interrelated; together they form the basis for Kracauer's belief in cinema's unique potential for (re-)experiences of the material world, an idea that is highlighted by the book's subtitle: *The Redemption of Physical Reality*. As Kracauer suggests,

> Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmentized. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.[21]

Kracauer's understanding of film as redeemer of physical reality, moreover, points to the underlying philosophical and political preoccupations of his material aesthetics, concerns that go beyond questions of the medium proper. In a letter to Theodor W. Adorno from 1949, Kracauer describes his intentions for *Theory of Film* as follows:

> Auch in diesem Buch wäre der Film nur ein Vorwand. Ich möchte zeigen, welche ästhetischen Gesetze und affinities für bestimmte Themen ein Medium entwickelt, das zu einer Zeit gehört, in der wissenschaftliches Interesse an den Zusammenhängen der kleinsten Elemente die Eigenkraft der großen, den ganzen Menschen umgreifenden Ideen und unsere Empfänglichkeit für solche Ideen immer mehr "aufhebt."[22]

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[21] Ibid., 300. In *History*, Kracauer comes back to the notion of redemption and ascribes this potential also to the field of historiography. "I have pointed out in *Theory of Film* that the photographic media help us overcome our abstractness by familiarizing us, for the first time as it were, with 'this Earth which is our habitat' (Gabriel Marcel); they help us to think *through* things, not above them. Otherwise expressed, the photographic media make it much easier for us to incorporate the transient phenomena of the outer world, thereby redeeming them from oblivion. Something of this kind will also have to be said of history." Kracauer, *History*, 192.

[22] Theodor W. Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer, *Briefwechsel, 1923-1966*, ed. Wolfgang Schopf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 445.

Kracauer's actual intentions for *Theory of Film*, in which film appears only as a pretext, become particularly evident in the book's final chapter, entitled "Film in Our Time," where he reflects on the possibilities of the medium for the contemporary condition of the humankind, referring both to the ongoing process of modernity and, albeit expressed less directly, the aftershocks of the Shoah. Identifying a crisis of experience and human subjectivity in an increasingly abstract world, Kracauer assigns to cinema a somehow utopian role, that is to assist the spectator in regaining a relationship with the fragmentary world and, in so doing, partake in the formation of (a new) human subjectivity. Thus, Kracauer's emphasis on the medium's exclusive potential is not concerned with the spectator as a private individual but rather as a public and social being. In Kracauer's view, as Heide Schlüpmann has suggested, cinema is thus "keine neue Kunst, sondern stellt eine Wende der Erkenntnis oder der Bedingungen der Erkenntnis dar." Or, as Gertrud Koch has put it, "film is a medium for locking into the world."[23]

As we can see, Kracauer's material aesthetics is not concerned primarily with ontological questions. Rather, the matter of experience can be considered the core of *Theory of Film*, even where Kracauer elaborates on the technical properties of the medium. In fact, every single aspect of the book's ontological implications is related—directly or indirectly—to questions of spectatorship and human subjectivity more generally. I concur with Miriam Hansen's suggestion that what *Theory of Film* provides us with "is not a theory of cinematic realism, but a theory of film experience and, more generally, of cinema as a sensory-perceptual matrix of experience."[24] The potentialities of the cinematic experience, however, hinge on photographic media's peculiar relationship with reality.

The three aspects briefly described above—film's ability to render the world visible, the sensory and physiological character of cinematic spectatorship, as well as the issue of the medium's possibilities for (counter)experiences in an increasingly rationalised world—which I consider central to Kracauer's theory of film experience—will now be examined in more detail. Following an introduction to Kracauer's material aesthetics, I give an overview at the end of this chapter of the rather problematic

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[23] Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 102.
[24] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 255.

reception history of *Theory of Film* as well as the recent re-evaluations of Kracauer's various contributions within the field of the humanities.

Photographic Media's Peculiar Relationship with Reality

In the preface to *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer distinguishes his theoretical approach from other writings on cinema by emphasising "that it is a *material aesthetics*, not a formal one." His book, as Kracauer further explains, "rests upon the assumption that film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with the medium a marked affinity for the visible world around us. Films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality."[25] In this brief passage, we can already find various of the book's key terms and concepts, namely film's *material* dimension and *photographic* nature, its peculiar relationship with *physical reality*, as well as the medium's *recording* and *revealing* qualities, all of which play a crucial role in Kracauer's idea of cinema's exclusive properties and possibilities.

Let us consider first the notion of film as an essentially photographic medium. In *Theory of Film*, photography inhabits a prominent place as the subject matter of the introductory chapter. Kracauer, as suggested in the statement quoted above, thinks of film's unique potential to record and reveal (and ultimately redeem) physical reality as deriving largely from its photographic properties (though later in the book he also discusses significant differences between the two media). Kracauer's emphasis on film's photographic nature principally refers to the camera's ability to render material phenomena visible, an idea which, according to Gertrud Koch, "contains the philosophical concept behind the entire book."[26]

The registering camera

In *Theory of Film*, photography's and film's recording faculty forms the fundamental basis of their peculiar relationship with physical reality. The premise from which Kracauer's argument about the uniqueness of photographic media (and their difference from other arts) departs is the camera's technical ability to register, somehow

[25] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, xlix.
[26] Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 96.

autonomously and unintentionally, all the material particulars (including the most peripheral) which in the moment of recording are located in front of the lens. In this context, Kracauer emphasises the mechanical (non-human) and in this sense objective character of the photographic process of recording, notwithstanding the photographer's or filmmaker's subjective choices in relation to framing, lighting and mise-en-scène or the selection of the technical equipment. It is this automatism, Kracauer argues, which constitutes photography's and, consequently, film's genuine relationship with raw material, and distinguishes them fundamentally from the traditional arts: "Works of art consume the raw material from which they are drawn, whereas films as an outgrowth of camera work are bound to exhibit it. […] If film is an art, it is art with a difference. Along with photography, film is the only art which leaves its raw material more or less intact."[27] Thus, rather than the creative interpretation by an artist, cinema, in Kracauer's view, is first and foremost a mechanical and material inscription of the world, the registering and, at the point of projection, re-*present*ation of a certain historical moment.

Ontological realism: of indices and icons

Kracauer's emphasis on film's photographic nature and its automatic character of recording shares similarities with conceptualisations of photographic media by French film critic André Bazin.[28] In his influential essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945), Bazin, combining anthropological and phenomenological arguments, aims to identify the essence of both photography and film, and localises them within the history of representational arts. In Bazin's view, the photographic image can be considered the fulfilment of human beings' attempt to represent life in its completeness. For centuries, he argues, the plastic arts, particularly Western painting, has been dominated by the endeavour of mimetic imitation, which he believes originates from the desire to overcome death (exemplified by the Egyptian practice of

[27] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, I.

[28] Various observers have drawn attention to the fact that, despite the obvious kinship of certain ideas and arguments, Bazin's original French essays and reviews from the 1940s and 1950s are not mentioned at any point in *Theory of Film*, whereas we can find numerous references to French theorists associated with the *filmologie*. Explanations for Bazin's absence are rather speculative, though there might be the possibility that Kracauer was simply not aware of Bazin's writings. At least, we can find no reference at all to those magazines where Bazin's articles (which had not yet been collected nor translated into English) were frequently published such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Esprit*.

mummification). As a consequence of the emergence of photography, and its accomplishment in resembling the world, Bazin suggests, painting was able to free itself from its "obsession with likeness."[29]

For Bazin, similarly to Kracauer, the exclusivity of photographic media results from the camera's technical capacity to reproduce objectively the phenomenal world. This results, he suggests, unlike in other mimetic arts, from the absence of human agents:

> The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re*-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.[30]

Aside from the photographic media's potential and frequent (yet not inherent) quality of likeness, Bazin particularly stresses the existential bond between the world ("the model") and its re-presentation in photography and film, a relationship which he characterises as "more than mere resemblance, namely a kind of identity"[31] and sharing "a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint,"[32] whereas film, by virtue of its temporal component, can be considered "an imprint of the duration of the object."[33]

> Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model.[34]

Bazin's ontological reflections about the material—that is, in the case of analogue photography, photo-chemical-process of photographic image production, subsequently formed the basis for theorisations of photographic media and their particular relationship with the world, conceptualisations which would become known under the

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[29] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 12.
[30] Ibid., 13–14.
[31] André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 96.
[32] Bazin, "Ontology," 15.
[33] Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," 97.
[34] Bazin, "Ontology," 14.

term indexicality. In fact, it was British film theorist Peter Wollen who, in his essay "The Semiology of the Cinema" (1969), first linked Bazin's ontology of photographic media with what was at that moment the dominant paradigm of semiotics. Wollen refers to the theory of the logic of signs by American analytical philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, yet he is particularly interested in one aspect of Peirce's sign theory, that is the triadic system of relationships between an object and its referent. According to Peirce, three ideal types of relations can be distinguished: the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic. Whereas the icon is defined by the similarity between object and referent, the index refers to their physical connection (photography serves here as an example for a primarily indexical relationship), and the symbol rests on arbitrary convention, though all categories may be co-existent. In accordance with Peirce's trichotomy, Wollen suggests the co-presence in cinema of all three dimensions of the sign (iconic, indexical, symbolic), though emphasising that "indexical and iconic aspects are by far the most powerful."[35]

Since Wollen's 1969 essay, which helped to turn Bazin's notion of the physical link (the photochemical emulsion caused by light rays) between the pro-photographic/-filmic event and its image re-presentation into an orderly scientific category, the conception of indexicality has become a basic assumption in ontological theorisations of photography and film, being regarded as *the* crucial evidence for photographic media's genuine relationship with reality. In line with this idea, regardless of the degree of resemblance—that is, in semiotic terms the iconic relationship—between the photographic image and the represented object, the index functions as a material trace of the real.

Over the last three decades, however, such conceptualisations have been gradually called into question as a result of the medium's digitisation, an advancing process that seems to have shaken the very foundations of film (and, consequently, of Film Studies). In particular, scholars have started to question the validity for the contemporary moment of film theories that are based on the photographic image. For D. N. Rodowick, cinema's digitisation on the level of recording, distribution and exhibition, is irreversible and will make film (meaning celluloid) disappear in the near future. The shift from celluloid to digital, along with the emergence of new audiovisual

[35] Peter Wollen, "The Semiology of the Cinema," in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 141.

media, he argues, has changed cinema and its academic study fundamentally. As Rodowick suggests,

> Digital synthesis produces an image of what never occurred in reality; it is a fully imaginative and intentional artifact. […] What looks photographically "real" has actually shed its indexical or casual qualities. Our previous perceptual criteria for realism have now ceded fully to imagination, fantasy and the counterfactual powers of possible worlds. When photography becomes simulation, it yields to a new imaginary that is unconstrained by casual processes; creation from physical reality gives way to the composition of "elastic" reality.[36]

Similarly, Francesco Casetti believes that cinema, as we have known it for a long time, is coming to an end. In his view, film is bound up with a particular experience that is in turn linked to modernity and the 20th century. That kind of experience, Casetti suggests, does not apply any longer to cinema in the digital age. In contrast to the photographic image, the digital

> not only permits the realization of extraordinary special effects, and thus the presentation of realities that do not exist in nature, but is also allows filmmakers to do without any pre-existing reality, even that of a model. We see on the screen things that have not necessarily passed before the camera, but are born for mathematical algorithms. What we follow are no longer *traces* but *inventions*. This means that the cinema ceases to be a tributary of the actual world. Before, film needed reality to create even possible worlds, while now it is not held accountable to the real world at all. The filmic image therefore no longer bears witness to anything; it stops being an *index* and becomes a *simulacrum*.[37]

Even though the scholarly debate about the consequences of photographic media's shift to the digital has also been concerned with the differences in the recording process of analogue and digital photographic media (the digital processing of the incoming light by a set of electronic data instead of, in the analogue procedure, by chemical coating), the most significant changes wrought by digital technologies have taken place, as suggested by Rodowick and Casetti in their very similar statements quoted above, on the level of (post)production.[38] Not only is the raw material of (most) digital films extremely modified (and much more extensively than that of their analogue counterparts) but also,

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[36] D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 169–70.

[37] Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity*, trans. Erin Larkin and Jennifer Pranolo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 189.

[38] See for the discussion on indexicality, for instance, Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," *Nordicom Review* 25, no. 1–2 (September 2004): 39– 50; Vinzenz Hediger, "Illusion und Indexikalität: Filmische Illusion im Zeitalter der postphotographischen Photographie," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 54, no. 1 (2006): 101–10; or the special issue "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," *Differences* 18, no. 1 (2007).

increasingly, these images do not even stem from recorded material; consequently, the medium's physical (indexical) bond with reality has weakened, if not vanished completely.

Between mimesis and alienation

This general assessment easily ignores the significant number of filmmakers worldwide who continue to use the medium, whether on celluloid or digital, with a photographic attitude. This issue will come up again in chapter 3. In the meantime, let us consider how these questions of indexicality are related to Kracauer's emphasis on film as an essentially photographic medium. "In semiotic terms," Miriam Hansen suggests in her introduction to *Theory of Film*,

> one might say that, by insisting on film's "photographic nature," Kracauer stresses the *indexical* dimension of film, the trace of a material bond with the world represented (the camera having been there at a certain point in time, light rays having linked the object with the photochemical emulsion for fractions of a second). This linkage is key to—but also qualifies and circumscribes—the *iconic* dimension of film, its ability to represent something as "real" through a relation of resemblance or analogy.[39]

Although one can read Kracauer's assertion of film's recording qualities as an indication of the medium's indexical and iconic relationship with reality, this should not be mistaken for a claim for authenticity and veracity. Rather, *Theory of Film* is concerned with cinema as a realm of experience that arises from this peculiar physical-mimetic bond. Moreover, Kracauer understands the relationship between photographic media and the material world as characterised not only by likeness but just as much by estrangement and de-familiarisation, as Miriam Hansen has further pointed out,

> Kracauer's investment in the photographic basis of film does not rest on the iconicity of the photographic sign, at least not in the narrow sense of a literal resemblance or analogy with a self-identical object. Nor, for that matter, does he conceive of the indexical, the photochemical bond that links image and referent, in any positivist way as merely anchoring the analogical "truth" of the representation. Rather, the same indexicality that allows photographic film to record and figure the world also inscribes the image with moments of temporality and contingency that *dis*figure the representation. If Kracauer seeks to ground his film aesthetics in the medium of photography, it is because photographic representation has the perplexing ability not only to resemble the world it depicts but also to render it strange, to destroy habitual fictions of self-

[39] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Introduction," in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, by Siegfried Kracauer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), viii.

> identity and familiarity. It is in this sense that the slippery term "affinities" (of the medium with material reality) includes both film's ability to *record* and its potential to *reveal* something in relation to that world.[40]

As Hansen highlights, for Kracauer alienating effects are an essential part of photographic media's peculiar mimesis, its capacity to expose both habitual and unfamiliar sights. Indeed, one could say that it is precisely cinema's mimetic quality which provides the foundation for the estrangement of familiar views. Kracauer's material aesthetics effectively involves the idea of *Entfremdungschancen*, "chances for alienation," as formulated in his Marseille notebooks. In *Theory of Film*, this notion is emphasised particularly at two points of the book: one, in the discussion of photography's alienating effects in the introductory chapter, and two, in the examination of film's revealing qualities under the heading "The Establishment of Physical Existence."

The alienating character intrinsic to photographic media is discussed with reference to a passage of *The Guermantes Way*, the third volume of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, a novel that serves as a main reference point throughout *Theory of Film*.[41] In this passage, quoted by Kracauer, Proust describes an incident that occurs when the narrator, after a long period of absence, makes an unannounced visit to his grandmother's home. When entering her living room, he initially remains undiscovered and thus makes the unexpected experience of perceiving his beloved grandmother from the perspective of a stranger:

> I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence. […] Of myself […] there was present only the witness, the observer with a hat and traveling coat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that mechanically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph.[42]

As the passage goes on, Proust's narrator elaborates on how memories and emotional attachment have hindered him from becoming aware of his grandmother's physical changes over the course of time. Only in the state of alienation described above,

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[40] Ibid., xxv.
[41] Kracauer's dialogue with Proust's novel continues and is intensified in his posthumously published book *History*.
[42] Quoted in Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 14.

detached momentarily from his personal emotions and memories, he is able to see his much-loved grandmother with the eyes of a stranger.

Kracauer discusses this passage in relation to Proust's comparison of the detached observer with the photographer. Despite acknowledging the importance of the process of alienation for the photographer's approach to the material world, Kracauer points to the problems that come along with definitions of photography as "the product of complete alienation." In fact, he criticises such conceptions as one-sided and being close to 19th century ideas of photographic realism as mirroring nature. As Kracauer insists, "there is no mirror at all."

> Photographs do not just copy nature but metamorphose it by transferring three-dimensional phenomena to the plane, serving their ties with the surroundings, and substituting black, gray, and white for the given colour schemes. Yet if anything defies the idea of a mirror, it is not so much these unavoidable transformations—which may be discounted because in spite of them photographs still preserve the character of compulsory reproductions—as the way in which we take cognizance of visible reality. Even Proust's alienated photographer spontaneously structures the inflowing impressions; the simultaneous perceptions of his other senses, certain perceptual form categories inherent in his nervous system, and not least his general dispositions prompt him to organize the visual raw material in the act of seeing.[43]

Cinema's revelatory power

If photographic media, as suggested by Kracauer, are capable of rendering visible the physical world, this peculiar ability goes beyond the camera's function as a recording device. In Kracauer's view, filmic images may be considered documents insofar as they are produced by mechanical registration, yet at the same time, they are re-presentations and therefore transformations of pro-filmic reality. Not only is the camera able to register material phenomena but also to render them strange. These estranging effects, Kracauer argues, are both inherent to film as a photographic medium and established by cinematic techniques. This is why in *Theory of Film* the camera's capacity to render visible the world is discussed in relation to film's recording *and* revealing functions. According to Kracauer, "any camera revelation involves recording, but recording on its part need not be revealing."[44]

[43] Ibid., 15.
[44] Ibid., 41.

In his examination of cinema's revelatory potential, Kracauer's focus lies on all the visible phenomena that are normally unnoticed because they are too big, too small, too disturbing or just too familiar. Overlooked and neglected in our everyday lives, these aspects of the material world, he suggests, are rendered visible by the illuminating eye of the camera and cinematic techniques. In doing so, filmic images are able to change familiar sights and challenge our habits of seeing. Kracauer shares the idea that cinema enables us to see what we would not perceive otherwise with Walter Benjamin. In his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin describes the movie camera and cinematic techniques such as the close-up or slow motion as instruments to discover something completely new and previously unseen:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject.[45]

Benjamin here hints at perceptual differences between the human being and the apparatus, the eye and the camera. For Benjamin, films function as an "optical unconscious": "The camera introduces us to unconscious optics, just as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."[46] Kracauer seems to concur with Benjamin when he remarks that "any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter: skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into cranes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally, and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before."[47]

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[45] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 2007), 229.
[46] Ibid., 230.
[47] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 48.

Cinematic techniques such as (extreme) close-ups show us what Kracauer terms a "reality of another dimension" or "contrived reality."[48] They enable us to see the outer world in new ways, discerning "patterns remote from reality as we know it."[49] However, as Kracauer insists, "these deviant images will be all the more significant if they keep close to the real-life material from which they stem; only then can they be expected to assume the revealing function peculiar to the medium."[50] Kracauer's claim for reality here is not so much a matter of authenticity; rather, he demands from the medium a close relation to the material world, pointing to the danger of abstraction that lies in a certain (ab)use of cinematic techniques for 'artistic' (overly inventive, experimental) purposes.[51] For Kracauer, the nature of film can be described as in some ways similar to science as "it breaks down material phenomena into tiny particles."[52]

By stressing the revelatory power of close-ups, which he regards as a uniquely photographic technique that enables us to see "hidden aspects of the world about us,"[53] Kracauer argues against Sergei Eisenstein's notion of close-ups—indeed, shots in general—as carriers of meaning, which is achieved mainly through montage. Where Eisenstein stresses their function for the film's narrative, for Kracauer, by contrast, close-ups do not primarily serve the purpose of the plot; single images are not merely elements in the montage.[54] The close-up of the female protagonist's face in Griffith's *After Many Years* (1908), for instance, may highlight her inner condition but it is, Kracauer insists, "also an end in itself."[55] In Kracauer's view, "huge images of small

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[48] Ibid., 49.

[49] Ibid., 53.

[50] Ibid., 49–50.

[51] For Kracauer, the same can be said about further cinematic techniques such as slow or accelerated motion. If used in the context of physical existence, such images may have a revealing function, thus being, despite their strangeness, as Jean Epstein has suggested, "but a portrait—seen in a certain perspective—of the world in which we live." Quoted in ibid., 53.

[52] Ibid., 50.

[53] Ibid., 49. Aside from the kinship with Benjamin, Kracauer shared the belief in cinema's revelatory power with Béla Balázs. For Balázs, who saw the filmic body as crucial for the creation of a new cinematic language, close shots were "film's true terrain."[53] Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 38. In Balázs's view, in particular the facial close-up opens up, as Erica Carter put it, "a new dimension of emotional experience that lies wholly outside the time-space of empirical experience." Erica Carter, "Introduction," in *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, by Béla Balázs (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), xxxiii.

[54] This does not mean, however, that Kracauer would not acknowledge the importance of editing, which he describes as "the most general and indispensable" of film's technical properties, *Theory of Film*, 29. Heide Schlüpmann has described Kracauer's *Theory of Film* as "a theory of montage based on an aesthetics of the individual photographic frame. […] The single frame only becomes the basis of montage because it itself already contains such montage *in nuce*." Heide Schlüpmann, "The Subject of Survival: On Kracauer's Theory of Film," trans. Jeremy Gaines, *New German Critique* 54 (Fall 1991): 119.

[55] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 47.

material phenomena," as shown in Griffith's films, "are not only integral components of the narrative but disclosures of new aspects of physical reality." Enlarged objects thus convert into "unknown organisms quivering with a life of their own."[56]

Whereas the close-up is the appropriate technique for the visualisation of small objects, long shots fulfil this function for large objects. However, as Kracauer remarks, huge phenomena may not be rendered visible best by a single image but by a combination of long and close shots. Thus, the film camera, similarly to a tourist in nature whose eyes wander about the landscape, should alternately focus on the entirety and the detail of its object by juxtaposing long shots and close-ups. For Kracauer, this combination of cinematic techniques again evokes comparisons to science, and particularly to the process that he sees embodied in the scientific method of "continuous to-and-fro-movement between the qualities of complex entities and those of their elements."[57]

Yet, the revealing virtue of the film camera is not limited to the aforementioned techniques but also refers to what Kracauer calls "blind spots of the mind": things normally unseen "because they stubbornly escape or attention in everyday life."[58] One of the distinctive qualities of photography, and especially film, is the visualisation of unconventional complexes: "The motion picture camera has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing to the fore—often just in moving about previously invisible interrelationships between parts of them. These newly arising complexes lurk behind the things and cut across their identifiable contexts."[59]

Moreover, cinematic objects include rather dreary ones that we normally refuse to see and therefore remain unnoticed. Whereas most people tend to look away from unglamorous things and phenomena, Kracauer argues that the film camera precisely feels attracted to them. Other types of objects cinema may render visible are of a (too) familiar nature; all the things and phenomena we presumably know best are often taken for granted and therefore overlooked: "Intimate faces, streets we walk day by day, the house we live in—all these things are part of us like our skin, and because we know them by heart we do not know them with the eye."[60] Films, then, enable us to re-discover

[56] Ibid., 48.
[57] Ibid., 52.
[58] Ibid., 53.
[59] Ibid., 54.
[60] Ibid., 55.

these surrounding phenomena by "alienat[ing] our environment in exposing it;"[61] in Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (*Zero for Conduct*, 1933), for instance, uncommon camera angles help to disclose "the unfamiliar in the familiar."[62] As a consequence, filmic images make us (re)see phenomena that are either neglected or overlooked in our everyday world.

Experiencing the Material World

Aside from film's foundation in photography, Kracauer's material aesthetics stresses the specificities of the cinematic experience and its influence on the spectator's fragmented subjectivity. In fact, ontological conceptualisations of the medium and questions of spectatorship are highly interconnected throughout *Theory of Film*; thus, photographic media's physical-mimetic relationship with reality, their recording and revealing qualities, are discussed constantly in relation to the subject matter of film reception.

In the Marseille notebooks, the starting point from which Kracauer's project of a material film aesthetics departs, the emphasis on the material dimension of the medium essentially revolves around the film spectator, who is conceptualised as a "corporeal-material being" and "human being with skin and hair."[63] In *Theory of Film*, with its shifting accent from materiality to physical reality, Kracauer's concern with cinema as a particular mode of experience continues, highlighted particularly in chapter 9, entitled "The Spectator." Starting with the assumption that "unlike the other type of pictures, film images affect primarily the spectator's senses, engaging him physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually,"[64] Kracauer identifies three reasons for the particular sensitiveness of the cinematic experience.

The first argument refers to film's basic (photographic) recording principle. By registering physical reality "for its own sake," Kracauer suggests, filmic images provoke a strong impression of reality: "Struck by the reality character of the resultant images,

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Miriam Hansen, "'With Skin and Hair': Kracauer's Theory of Film, Marseille 1940," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring 1993): 458.
[64] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 158.

the spectator cannot help reacting to them as he would to the material aspects of nature in the raw which these photographic images produce."[65]

Kracauer's second explanation for the sensory dimension of film reception also relates to the medium's recording qualities, namely the ability to produce "the impression of a flow, a constant movement."[66] Having already been regarded, in the section on film's recording qualities, as purely cinematic—a feature beyond the medium's photographic nature which "only the motion picture camera is able to record"[67]—the significance of movement is emphasised here again. "Movement," Kracauer argues, "is the alpha and the omega of the medium. Now the sight of it seems to have a 'resonance effect,' provoking in the spectator such kinesthetic responses as muscular reflexes, motor impulses, or the like. In any case, objective movement acts as a physiological stimulus."[68]

Third, the highly somatic character of film experience is explained as resulting from the medium's potential to reveal "otherwise hidden provinces" of the material world, "including such spatial and temporal configurations as may be derived from the given data with the aid of cinematic techniques and devices."[69] These cinematic encounters with unfamiliar sights of the familiar world, Kracauer suggests, have a physical effect on the spectator's body: "The unknown shapes he encounters involves not so much his power of reasoning as his visceral faculties. Arousing his innate curiosity, they lure him into dimensions where sense-impressions are all-important."[70]

As we can see, filmic images, in Kracauer's view, affect the spectator's senses by virtue of, first, their proximity to the material world, second, the medium's moving character (in the double sense), and third, cinematic transformations of pro-filmic reality. Although the first and third argument seem to contradict each other, for Kracauer the familiar and the unfamiliar character of filmic images are two sides of the same coin: binary elements of the medium's physical-mimetic relationship with the material world, similar and, at the same time, different to it. As a consequence of the sensory character of film perception, Kracauer argues, the film spectator's "self as the

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 42.
[68] Ibid., 158.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 159.

mainspring of thoughts and decisions relinquishes its power of control,"[71] a fact which distinguishes the cinematic experience fundamentally from observing a play in the theatre. To highlight this difference, Kracauer cites an anonymous French woman: "In the theater I am always I but in the cinema I dissolve into all things and beings."[72] Films, Kracauer suggests, "tend to weaken the spectator's consciousness," a condition which "may be furthered by the darkness in moviehouses. Darkness automatically reduces our contact with actuality, depriving us of many environmental data needed for adequate judgements and other mental activities. It lulls the mind."[73] As a result of their lowered consciousness, cinemagoers find themselves "in a state between waking and sleeping,"[74] circumstances which make the cinematic experience comparable to the state of dreaming.

In his account of cinema's dream-like character, Kracauer distinguishes two interrelated directions of dreaming. The first one is directed toward the object world of filmic images:

> Released from the control of consciousness, the spectator cannot help feeling attracted by the phenomena in front of him. They beckon him to come nearer. […] Yet the spectator cannot hope to apprehend, however incompletely, the being of any object that draws him into its orbit unless he meanders, dreamingly, though the maze of its multiple meanings and psychological correspondences. Material existence, as it manifests itself in film, launches the moviegoer into unending pursuits.[75]

The second direction of the cinematic dreaming process, then, "leads the spectator away from the given image into subjective reveries," thus making the plethora of filmic phenomena interact with the viewer's personal memories, fantasies and desires:

> Once the spectator's organized self has surrendered, his subconscious or unconscious experiences, apprehensions and hopes tend to come out and take over. Owing to their indeterminacy, films shots are particularly fit to function as an ignition spark. Any such shot may touch off chain reactions in the moviegoer—a flight of associations which no longer revolve around their original source but arise from his agitated inner environment.[76]

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 163.
[75] Ibid., 164–65.
[76] Ibid., 165.

Notwithstanding the distinction between these two movements (outwards and inwards) of the dream-like film experience, Kracauer emphasises the strong interrelationship of both processes:

> These apparently opposite movements of dreaming are in practice well-nigh inseparable from each other. Trance-like immersion in a shot or a succession of shots may at any moment yield to daydreaming which increasingly disengages itself from the imagery occasioning it. […] Together the two intertwined dream processes constitute a veritable stream of consciousness whose contents—cataracts of indistinct fantasies and inchoate thoughts—still bear the imprint of the bodily sensations from which they issue. This stream of consciousness in a measure parallels "the flow of life," one of the main concerns of the medium.[77]

The Good of Film Experience

As I have shown so far, Kracauer's notion of cinema's exclusive possibilities rests on the camera's technological capacity to render visible (and in motion) the material world, producing images which resemble this world as much as they render it strange. Herein, on the basis of and in addition to the camera as a recording device, lies photographic media's revelatory potential, namely its capacity to alienate the spectator from familiar surroundings and to render these surroundings unfamiliar. In this way, film alters both the object (the world) and the subject (the spectator); hence, our vision of reality. These effects are intensified, moreover, by the sensory and somatic character of film perception. For Kracauer, the material properties of film and the conditions of cinema put the audience in a dream-like state, allowing spectators, "wavering between self-absorption and self-abandonment,"[78] to connect viscerally with the visible phenomena, as displayed on screen, and their own personal memories and daydreams.[79] Thus, Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, rather than promoting a theory of realism, conceptualises cinema as a mode of experience.

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[77] Ibid., 166.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Kracauer's notion of the spectators' daydreams, which interrelate with the filmic images, is different, though, from his psychosocial understanding of films as the "daydreams of society," as described in "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies." In this article from 1928, as well as in his later study, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer, as Thomas Y. Levin has observed, aimed to "grasp a film's ideological reconfiguration of the world as itself a socially symptomatic—and thus in an important sense 'real'—political fact." Thomas Y. Levin, "Introduction," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, by Siegfried Kracauer, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 24.

Yet, "what is the good of film experience?," Kracauer asks at the beginning of the book's epilogue, entitled "Film in Our Time," a question which he considers "the most central of all."[80] In the epilogue, Kracauer not only summarizes his approach to cinema but also situates it within broader questions, that is the contemporaneous situation of the humankind under the conditions of modernity. In fact, the concern with the consequences of modernity can be considered a continuous factor in Kracauer's writings from the 1920s to the 1960s; this preoccupation is also what links Kracauer's work with the project of the Frankfurt School at large. At the end of the day, all of his considerations with reference to the properties and possibilities of photographic media seem to relate to Kracauer's main concern, that is the critical condition of the modern subject and the crucial part that cinema may play in this context.

Under the subheading "The Intellectual Landscape," Kracauer refers to a crisis of experience and human subjectivity in modern (Western) societies. This crisis is understood predominantly as resulting from, first, the decline in common beliefs (religions, ideologies) and, second, a tendency to abstractness. Both characteristics point to historical processes associated with modernity and the Enlightenment; secularisation and demythologisation, on the one hand, and rationalisation, on the other.

Taking Emile Durkheim's phrase of the "ruins of ancient beliefs," Kracauer suggests that, as a consequence of the weakening of common—particularly religious but also secular—beliefs as organising principles for people's lives, modern societies find themselves in a process of constant disintegration. "Man in or society," Kracauer writes, "is ideologically shelterless,"[81] an observation which seems to refer back to the notion of "transcendental homelessness," coined by Georg Lukács in the 1920s.[82] Whereas in the "liberal camp," in accordance with ideas of the Enlightenment, this development is seen as largely positive, as part of the evolutionary progress from religion towards human reason, there are, on the other hand, Kracauer suggests, "all those who plead for the rehabilitation of communal faith in revealed truth or in a great cause or in an inspired leader." [83] Kracauer's position has been regarded as being close to anti-

[80] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 285.
[81] Ibid., 288.
[82] As various commentators have observed, Lukács's phrase, which had an enormous impact on many affiliates of the Frankfurt School, can be seen as a continuous trope of Kracauer's writings, perhaps the most persistent alongside the motif of extraterritoriality.
[83] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 290.

totalitarian and post-ideological beliefs, both for subsuming communism under the category of *ersatz* religions and for asserting that the Soviet Union, just like every society with a certain level of well-being, would eventually be befallen by "the same ideological exhaustion"[84] as identified for the Western world.

Yet despite a possible impact of American anti-communism on (the epilogue of) *Theory of Film*, the core of Kracauer's reflections lies elsewhere, and not all too far from essential preoccupations of his Weimar writings.[85] In various of his articles from the mid-1920s onwards, such as in the two famous essays from 1927, "The Mass Ornament" and "Photography," Kracauer analyses the impact of historical processes associated with the Enlightenment on culture and society. In "The Mass Ornament," for instance, Kracauer considers the historical process "a battle between a weak and distant reason and the forces of nature,"[86] a conflict between the persisting process of demythologisation from natural bonds, on the one hand, and formations of re-mythologisation, on the other. As he suggests,

> In serving the breakthrough of truth, the historical process becomes a *process of demythologization* which effects a radical deconstruction of the positions that the natural continually reoccupied. The French Enlightenment is an important example of the struggle between reason and the mythological delusions that have invaded the domains of religion and politics. This struggle continues, and in the course of history it may be that nature, increasingly stripped of its magic, will become more and more pervious to reason.[87]

In the final chapter of *Theory of Film*, too, Kracauer conceptualises cinema with reference to the chances and pitfalls of the Enlightenment and possible ways to overcome its disintegrating effects. The notion of the "ruins of ancient beliefs" thus need to be understood as a consequence of the ongoing processes of secularisation and demythologisation.

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[84] Ibid., 291. See for continuities and discontinuities of Kracauer's (political) positions, Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson, "Introduction: Affinities," in *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, by Siegfried Kracauer, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 22. See for similarities to post-ideological assertions, Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 256. See also the disagreement between Adorno and Kracauer about the term "Ideologieverlust" in the German edition of *Theory of Film*, Adorno and Kracauer, *Briefwechsel*, 629; 639-40.

[85] In fact, Kracauer has always been suspicious of abstract-utopian thought. Even when from the mid-1920s onwards he started to open himself for Marxist ideas, he was highly critical of Marx's determined conception of history (based on Hegel's dialectics) and the reduction of Marxism to economism.

[86] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 79.

[87] Ibid., 81.

In addition, rationality, a further essence of the Enlightenment, is discussed in *Theory of Film* with reference to "abstractness," a term which for Kracauer denotes "the abstract manner in which people of all walks of life perceive the world and themselves."[88] Kracauer detects an increasing tendency toward abstraction in all areas of modern life, for which he holds accountable the strong impact of scientific procedures. The abstractness of the sciences (particularly in the natural but also, increasingly, the human sciences) manifests itself, he argues, in their emphasis on measurability. "While scientific operations become more and more esoteric, the abstractness inherent in them cannot but influence our habits of thought." [89] For Kracauer, the massive consequences of scientific abstractness for people's lives and their experience of reality can be observed best in the growing importance of technology: "People are technological-minded—which, for instance, implies that gratifications they derive from certain media of communications often bear no relation to the quality of the communications themselves. The transmitting apparatus overwhelms the contents transmitted."[90]

Unlike Kracauer's emphasis on the impact of science on the modern world's drift to abstraction, the abstract rationality of the capitalist economy is not addressed in *Theory of Film*. In his 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament," by contrast, Kracauer stresses capitalism's inherent abstractness, which because of its false, that is limited form of rationality (for ignoring the human element) is understood both as "a stage in the process of demystification" [91] and a threat for the fulfilment of the Enlightenment. Kracauer therefore demands a further phase of enlightened rationalisation, suggesting that capitalism "rationalizes not too much but rather too little":

> the *Ratio* of the capitalist economic system is not reason itself but a murky reason. Once past a certain point, it abandons the truth in which it participates. *It does not encompass man*. The operation of the production process is not regulated according to man's needs, and man does not serve as the foundation for the structure of the socioeconomic organization. Indeed, at no point whatsoever is the system founded on the basis of man. "The basis of man": this does not mean that capitalist thinking should cultivate man as a historically produced form such that it ought to allow him to go unchallenged as a personality and should satisfy the demands made by his nature. The adherents

[88] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 291.
[89] Ibid., 292.
[90] Ibid., 293. This is, of course, a highly topical question, considering the increasing importance of media technology in current societies.
[91] Kracauer, "Mass Ornament," 80.

> of this position reproach capitalism's rationalism for raping man, and yearn for the return of a community that would be capable of preserving the allegedly human element much better than capitalism. Leaving aside the stultifying effect of such regressive stances, they fail to grasp capitalism's core defect: it rationalizes not too much but rather *too little*.[92]

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer's attitude differs from that in the "Mass Ornament" essay in two significant ways: not only is there no reference to the abstract rationalisation immanent to the capitalist mode of production, he also does not believe any more that more rationalisation could mean a possible way out of the contemporary condition of (false) abstractness and alienation.[93] Implying that the sole emphasis on human reason might not be sufficient to fulfil the promises of the Enlightenment, Kracauer makes out a deep need to experience the world more concretely. "What we want," he enthusiastically formulates, "is to touch reality not only with the fingertips but to seize it and shake hands with it."[94] Kracauer therefore suggests that "if we want to assimilate values that delimit our horizon we must first rid ourselves of that abstractness as best we can. In trying to meet this challenge, we may still not be able to cast anchor in ideological certainties, yet at least we stand a chance of finding something we did not look for, something tremendously important in its own right—the world that is ours."[95] Indeed, it is cinema which, in Kracauer's view, can lead a way out of the void of abstractness. This does not mean, however, a return to some imagined state of harmony and wholeness; rather, the cinematic experience is understood as supporting new formations of fragmented modern subjectivities:

> Because of the waning of ideology the world we live in is cluttered with debris, all attempts at new syntheses notwithstanding. *There are no wholes in the world*;

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[92] Ibid., 81.

[93] Whereas Kracauer, in his "Photography" essay from 1927, considers photographic media as the "go-for-broke-game-of-history," ascribing them a key role for the future of the humankind under the extreme changes of modernity, *Theory of Film* is written, as various commentators have pointed out, at a very different moment in history, a point when the catastrophe of the Shoah had taken place and the massive scale of the mass destruction had become apparent. *Theory of Film* differs from Kracauer's Weimar writings on photographic media, as Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann have argued, since it is not concerned with film as a phenomenon of late capitalism but, despite only very brief references to Nazi concentration camps in the book, with questions of the medium after Auschwitz. This becomes apparent in the book's emphasis on physical existence and continuum; in Schlüpmann's words, "the subject of survival." According to Koch and Schlüpmann, Kracauer's own experience as survivor of the Shoah is inscribed in the notion of redemption. In February 1933, shortly after the Nazis came to power, one day after the Reichstag fire, Kracauer, for being a Jewish left-wing intellectual, and his wife Lili Ehrenreich were forced to leave Berlin. After difficult and life-threatening years in Paris (1933-40) and particularly Marseille (1940/41), in April 1941 they ultimately found a safe haven in New York.

[94] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 297.

[95] Ibid., 296.

> rather, it consists of bits of chance events whose flow substitutes for meaningful continuity. Correspondingly, individual consciousness must be thought of as an aggregate of splinters of beliefs and sundry activities; and since the life of the mind lacks structure, impulses from psychosomatic regions are apt to surge up and fill the interstices. *Fragmentized individuals act out their parts in fragmentized reality*.[96]

If film, in Kracauer's view, is the right medium for a disintegrating world, this has to do with its fundamental differences from the traditional arts. As stated earlier on, Kracauer regards cinema as an "art with a difference," and this difference is understood as arising from the medium's singular relationship with raw material. As Kracauer suggests, "In the work of art nothing remains of the raw material itself, or, to be precise, all that remains of it is so molded that it implements the intentions conveyed through it. In a sense, the real-life material disappears in the artist's intentions."[97] Cinema, by contrast, "is materialistically minded; it proceeds from 'below' to 'above.'" In other words, spiritual or otherwise psychic concepts originate from concrete matter, referring to the materiality of both the object (physical reality) and the subject (the spectator's corporeality). At this point, he quotes art historian Erwin Panofsky,

> The processes of all the earlier representational arts conform, in a higher or lesser degree, to an idealistic conception of the world. These arts operate from top to bottom, so to speak, they start with an idea to be projected into shapeless matter and not with the objects that constitute the world. […] It is the movies, and only the movies that do justice to the materialistic interpretation of the universe which, whether we like it or not, pervades contemporary civilization.[98]

Thus, in contrast to the idea of autonomous art, the filmic medium requires "self-effacement"[99] and "active passivity"[100] of the filmmaker, as Kracauer defined the task of the historian.

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[96] Ibid., 297–98 (emphasis added). Though acknowledging the fragmentation of reality, Kracauer emphasises the demand for "ontological postulates" (dissociating himself from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*). See Siegfried Kracauer, "Talk with Teddie," in *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, by Siegfried Kracauer, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 127–30.
[97] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 300.
[98] Quoted in ibid., 309.
[99] Kracauer, *History*, 84.
[100] Ibid., 85.

The Conflicting Principles of the Feature Film

Notwithstanding Kracauer's claim for the filmmaker's self-restraint, it is important to stress again that cinema's potential for experiences of the material world, as conceptualised in *Theory of Film*, is not simply given but needs to be achieved (on the part of both the filmmaker and the spectator). Consequently, one of the the crucial questions for this study is to what extent film(maker)s make use of the possibilities arising from the medium's peculiar relationship with physical reality. For Kracauer, cinema, and particularly the feature film, is characterised by conflicting principles. In *Theory of Film*, these different approaches to the medium are (in)famously labelled the "realistic" and "formative" main tendencies, or alternatively, the "cinematic" against the "theatrical." Rather than being concerned with questions of cinematic realism as such, with these opposing poles Kracauer points to tensions between different modes of representation, contrasting the leaning to dramatization and narrative closure with the openness and indeterminacy of images that preserve a relative independence from both the story and signification.

The two main tendencies

In analogy to his argument about conflicting practices of photography made in the introductory chapter, Kracauer characterises two principal tendencies of film(making): the realistic and the formative.[101] These opposites, he argues, can be traced back (yet are not limited) to the origins of cinema, namely the photographic realism of the Lumière brothers, on the one hand, and the escapist illusionism of Georges Méliès, on the other.[102] Whereas the realist approach, in Kracauer's view, "acknowledges the basic aesthetic principle" [103] of film, a medium which, analogously to photography, "is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality and, hence, gravitates toward it," [104] film(maker)s of the formative tendency, by contrast, tend to dismiss these

[101] Kracauer's notion of the two main tendencies, notwithstanding some overlappings, is not congruent with Bazin's assertion of "two broad and opposing trends: those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality." André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24.
[102] Although recognising his contributions to the development of cinema, Kracauer argues that Méliès "still remained the theater director he had been. He used photography in a pre-photographic spirit." *Theory of Film*, 33.
[103] Ibid., 38.
[104] Ibid., 28.

exclusive possibilities of cinema. Rather than approaching the material world, formalistic approaches, he argues, regularly turn away from actuality and focus instead on historical or fantastic subject matters.

Arguably, the "infamous section on the 'two main tendencies'" [105] has contributed, more than any other feature of *Theory of Film*, to Kracauer's reputation as "the ayatollah of realism."[106] But even though Kracauer shows a clear preference for realistic approaches, his notion of opposing attitudes toward the medium does not exhaust itself in the advocacy of realism (which anyway should not be understood as a claim for authenticity but rather for a concentration on materiality and physical existence). Not only is Kracauer's assertion of the two main tendencies well informed of the fact that even the most realistic approach to the medium involves formative elements, he even suggests that a synthesis of the two may be the best possible way to benefit from cinema's inherent possibilities. "As in photography," Kracauer remarks, "everything depends on the 'right' balance between the realistic tendency and the formative tendency, and the two tendencies are well balanced if the latter does not try to overwhelm the former but eventually follows its lead."[107] Moreover, Kracauer's idea of the medium's realistic tendency is not always in accord with traditional understandings of cinematic realism; examples for the leaning to the material world include, aside from the expected films associated with Italian Neorealism, sequences from musical films, Charlie Chaplin comedies as well as D. W. Griffith's early 'blockbusters.'

The dilemma of narration

In addition to and of very similar character to the well-known dichotomy between photographic media's realistic and formative tendencies, one can find a further opposition in *Theory of Film*, that is the uneven relationship between story elements and "small moments of material life"[108] (Béla Balázs) without a clear narrative function. In cinema, the feature film in particular, Kracauer suggests, these two principles heavily conflict with each other. On the one hand, in accordance with cinema's realistic tendency, one can observe the penetration of physical reality 'for its own sake.' On the

[105] Hansen, "Introduction," xvi.
[106] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 78.
[107] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 39.
[108] Quoted in ibid., 89.

other hand, however, the medium leans toward dramatization and narrative closure; these compositional plot components—termed as "intrigue" throughout *Theory of Film*—are understood as manifestations of the formative tendency. As Kracauer suggests, "practically all films following the lines of a theatrical story evolve narratives whose significance overshadows that of the raw material of nature used for their implementation."[109]

For Kracauer, the theatrical story, and here especially the form of the classical tragedy, is the genre that clashes most strongly with cinema's unique potential of rendering encounters with material phenomena. "From the angle of film," Kracauer writes, "the theatrical play is composed of units which represent a crude abbreviation of camera-life. To say the same in cinematic terms, the theatrical story proceeds by way of 'long shots.'"[110] Rather than presenting the entire physical world—its human *and* non-human aspects—theatrical films, due to their dependence on traditional dramas, show an exclusive "concern for human characters and human interrelations."[111] For similar reasons, they have the habit of relying heavily on dialogue and, in so doing, ignore fundamentally cinema's visual nature. Moreover, the tendency of the theatrical story toward composition, intelligibility and narrative closure stands in stark contrast with film's close affinity for contingency, indeterminacy and endlessness.[112] As a result, films relying on the theatrical principle lean towards the creation of "a whole with a purpose,"[113] an endeavour which Kracauer regards as being opposed to cinema's exclusive possibilities.

For their indifference to material reality, Kracauer also considers many experimental films as belonging to the formative camp, suggesting that

> average theatrical films and certain high level *avant-garde* films must be lumped together in spite of all that separates them. Films of this kind exploit, not explore, the material phenomena they insert; they insert them not in their own interest but for the purpose of establishing a significant whole; and in pointing up some

[109] Ibid., 36.
[110] Ibid., 219.
[111] Ibid., 218.
[112] For Kracauer, the novel, similar to film (and in contrast to the classical drama) shows a preference for endlessness: "The novel on its part is the form of expression of a later age which no longer knows of ultimate meanings, so that the life it contains […] does not manifest itself in a rounded-out cycle of eternal presences but evolves in chronological time without beginning and end." Ibid., 233. Yet different to film's main focus on the material continuum, the novel, language-bound as it is, primarily produces a mental continuum. Ibid., 237.
[113] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 221–22 (also 227 and 265).

> such whole, they refer us from the material dimension back to that of ideology.[114]

In accordance with the medium's realistic tendency, Kracauer suggests, the camera's penetration of the physical world should not be driven by a higher purpose and therefore not overloaded with symbolic or other messages. Rather, it is the apparently insignificant details which matter most, fragments of reality with a relative independence from the story, such as "the ripple of leaves stirred in the wind" in a Lumière film, which is referred to several times throughout *Theory of Film*.

Yet despite this overall preference for film's non-purposeful engagement with such material phenomena—fragments of reality, as one might call them—Kracauer acknowledges a certain demand for story elements, drawing attention to "those aspects of potentially visible reality which only personal involvement is apt to summon."[115] This requirement for narration and composition is first identified in documentary films. "The demand for the story," he notes,

> re-emerges within the womb of the non-story film. In fact, the body of existing documentaries testifies to a persistent tendency toward dramatization. But how is it possible for the film maker to follow this tendency—tell a story, that is—and yet try to capture the flow of life? Or to put it this way, how can he do justice to the two conflicting principles according to which the story both obstructs and stimulates camera explorations? In rendering the world around us, he seems to be faced with the dilemma of having to sacrifice either its alienation or its fullness.[116]

For Kracauer, the merging of the theatrical principle, exemplified by the classical tragedy and the *film d'art*, into a cinematic attitude to the visible world, can be considered an "insoluble dilemma."[117] In this context, he praises D. W. Griffith for his "admirable nonsolution."[118] Griffith's films, Kracauer argues, "are full of fissures traceable to his cinematic instinct rather than technical awkwardness," thus not transcending but rather keeping the contradictions alive: "On the one hand, he [Griffith] certainly aims at establishing dramatic continuity as impressively as possible; on the other, he invariably inserts images which do not just serve to further the action or convey relevant moods but retain a degree of independence of the intrigue and thus succeed in summoning

[114] Ibid., 301.
[115] Ibid., 212.
[116] Ibid., 213.
[117] Ibid., 230.
[118] Ibid., 231.

physical existence."[119] Miriam Hansen, among others, has drawn attention to the asymmetrical character of Kracauer's polarities: "While clearly invested in having the balance tipped toward the pole of realism, what interests Kracauer," Hansen suggests, "is how narrative films engage with the dialectical tension generated by its antinomies, how they seek to resolve a 'dilemma,' that is by definition irresoluble."[120]

As we can see, the realistic (cinematic) and the formative (theatrical) tendency are not to be understood as absolute categories but rather as dialectical counterparts, "thesis and antithesis in a Hegelian sense,"[121] as suggested by Kracauer. This dialectical evocation, however, needs to be treated with caution, and not only because of Kracauer's lifelong aversion to Hegel. Rather, the antagonism of the two clashing attitudes to the medium, as described throughout *Theory of Film*, is not actually 'sublated'; thus, tensions between the realistic and the formative, the cinematic and the theatrical, are not transcended but remain. Indeed, one could argue that for Kracauer these conflicts and paradoxes are cinema's productive force. In fact, not only *Theory of Film* but also *History* are full of such non-transcended binaries; aside from the polarisation between the realistic and the formative tendency, of narrative structure against semi-autonomous elements of material phenomena, we can find further oppositions like micro (close-up) versus macro perspective (long shot) or the conceptualisation of time/history as a continuous and, at the same time, discontinuous process. Kracauer's "side-by-side" principle, as Drehli Robnik has observed, dissociates itself from the belief in an "either/or"[122]: "Instead of film unalienated by story form, plunging us into into a wild microphysics of particulars or an idyll of details," Robnik suggests, "Kracauer ultimately votes for cinematic stories that are found or emergent; he favors togetherness in paratactical separation and provisional configurations to utopian purity."[123]

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 275.
[121] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 30.
[122] Kracauer, *History*, 200–206.
[123] Drehli Robnik, "Among Other Things—a Miraculous Realist," in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 269.

(Theory of) Film in Its and in Our Time

Siegfried Kracauer can be considered "one of those authors," Gertrud Koch suggests in her insightful introduction to Kracauer's life and work,

> to whom that sad saying applies: his fame is nothing more than "the sum of errors" connected with his name. Under his name we would find Harold Bloom's fictitious "map of misreading" with all the possible contradictory but also productive interpretations and with all the unproductive misunderstandings that have tended to get in the way. Most prominent among these are some theorists of film who wish to do their best to punish the name Kracauer for having produced a naive apology for realism, without actually having understood the philosophical construction on which his phenomenology of film rests. As a consequence, cycles of readings have come and gone. The reception of Kracauer still stands on unsteady feet, to the extent that it stands at all.[124]

Taking Koch's introductory remark on the problematic reception of Kracauer's oeuvre as a starting point, this study is obviously intended to offer a 'productive interpretation' (or at least a productive misunderstanding) rather than producing a further 'unproductive misunderstanding.' Furthermore, I would suggest that Koch's observation about the unreliability of the existing scholarship, though certainly accurate when her introduction to Kracauer was first published in the mid-1990s, needs to be modified, considering the re-emerging attention to Kracauer's oeuvre over the last decades. In fact, since Kracauer's centenary in 1989 we can observe a gradually rising interest in his work, particularly among scholars in the United States. Thanks to these new insights and re-evaluations, the feet on which the reception of Kracauer rests, to use Koch's image, have become much more steady. However, several misreadings, to which Koch's observation refers above, continue to have a strong impact on the reputation of Kracauer's writings. This is especially true with regard to his material film aesthetics. For this reason, before describing how I intend to apply Kracauer's *Theory of Film* to contemporary (realist) cinema, I will give a brief overview of the book's rather problematic history of reception.

A problematic reception

From the date of its original publication in 1960, *Theory of Film* has been discussed rather controversially. Notwithstanding a number of positive responses—for instance,

[124] Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 3.

Rudolf Arnheim, author of one of the first monographs on cinema, *Film als Kunst* (1932), and another German émigré in the United States, praised it as "probably the most intelligent book ever written on the subject of film"[125]—Kracauer's notion of cinema provoked largely negative reactions; indeed, *Theory of Film* became, as Miriam Hansen has observed, "the object of critical demolition early on."[126] The starting point of this demolition was definitely the accusation of over-theorisation and tautological thinking by American film critic Pauline Kael in her book review for the British film magazine *Sight and Sound* in 1962. "Kracauer is the sort of man," Kael opens her deprecatory stance on *Theory of Film*,

> who can't say "It's a lovely day" without first establishing that it *is* day, that the term "day" is meaningless without the dialectical concept of "night," that both these terms have no meaning unless there is a world in which day and night alternate, and so forth. By the time he has established an epistemological system to support his right to observe that it's a lovely day, our day has been spoiled.[127]

Having read these opening lines, it is not surprising that Kael dismisses the book's central notion, cinema's redemption of physical reality: "What do movies have to do with the 'redemption' of 'physical reality'? Our physical reality—what we experience about us—is what we can't redeem: if it's good, marvelous; if not, we can weep or booze, or try to change it. Redemption, like sublimation, is a dear, sweet thought."[128] What is most astonishing about Kael's polemic, notwithstanding some accurate observations, is her ostensible unwillingness to comprehend Kracauer's peculiar approach to the medium.[129]

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[125] Rudolf Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1963): 291. Similar favourable statements came from the circle of New-York's film theorists.

[126] Hansen, "Introduction," ix. See for some immediate negative reactions in West-Germany after the publication of the book's German translation in 1964, Helmut Lethen, "Sichtbarkeit: Kracauers Liebeslehre," in *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen*, ed. Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1990), 196–97. Eric Rentschler has drawn attention to the popularity of *Theory of Film* among West-German filmmakers and writers in the 1970s, "Kracauer, Spectatorship, and the Seventies," in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 61–75.

[127] Pauline Kael, "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism? Or, Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*," in *I Lost It at the Movies* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2002), 269. Kael's review was originally published in *Sight & Sound* (31, no.2 [Spring 1962]). The title of the original essay is almost identical, except that it says "Nature" instead of "Theory." To Kael's credit, this was not a mistake, as Miriam Hansen and Eric Rentschler have suggested, but a reference to the first UK edition of Kracauer's book, published as *Nature of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* by Dennis Dobson, London in 1961.

[128] Ibid., 270.

[129] See for a critical assessment of Kael's relentless attack on Kracauer, Susie Linfield, "Kael and Kracauer: The (Very) Odd Couple," in *Talking about Pauline Kael: Critics, Filmmakers, and Scholars Remember an Icon*, ed. Wayne Stengel (London: Rowmann & Littlefield, 2015), 145–58.

Perhaps even more momentous than Kael's deeply polemical attack was the negative evaluation of *Theory of Film* by film scholar Dudley Andrew. In his influential *The Major Film Theories* (1976), the first comprehensive overview of theoretical approaches to the medium, Andrew portrays Kracauer's book as "a huge homogenous block of realist theory"[130] and "a teleology of cinema,"[131] which he contrasts negatively with the writings of French film critic André Bazin, the other prominent representative of film theory's "realist camp." This assertion reappears in Andrew's follow-up *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984): "While Bazin's notions of standard perception derive from Bergson and Sartre and are substantially more complicated than Kracauer's naïve realism, both men think of cinema as extending, rather than altering, perception."[132] The reputation as a naïve and dogmatic advocate of realism, shaped by Kael and Andrew, among others, would haunt Kracauer for a long time, perhaps even until today.[133]

Yet, it was not only the misleading criticism of *Theory of Film* which had an impact on how the book and its author would be regarded in the years following the publication. Likewise, theoretical approaches to cinema began to change significantly, with the result that phenomenological-realist conceptualisations of the medium would be seen as outdated, unscientific and politically reactionary. In fact, the 1960s and 1970s were decades of fundamental shifts in emphasis, in terms of both methodologies and subject matters, in the institutionalising field of Film Studies.

From the late 1950s onwards, we can witness the advent of structuralism, a so-called linguistic turn which became dominant not only in relation to studies of cinema but in various disciplines of the humanities. The main reference points were semiotic

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[130] Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 106.
[131] Ibid., 125.
[132] Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 19.
[133] It is notable that both Kael and Andrew refer to the Germanness of Kracauer's book, be it in relation to "pedantry" (Kael) or "seriousness" (Andrew). Dudley Andrew has recently made a re-appraisal of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, describing the book "as the most ambitious treatise on the cinema written by anyone from this school of thought [Frankfurt School]. Yet *Theory of Film* has until recently been largely ignored. I contributed to this neglect in *The Major Film Theories*, being relatively ignorant at the time of Kracauer's journalism of the 1920s. And, indeed, Kracauer's *Theory of Film* did seem like an orphan, in dialogue with no active discourse community—Frankfurt school or otherwise—especially in comparison to Bazin, whose works, collected around the same time, were written within an unbroken and vibrant French tradition of criticism. Kracauer came off badly in the inevitable comparison with Bazin at a time when realist theory as a whole, and Bazin's star in particular, had dimmed considerably. Kracauer was thus doubly cursed, at least until the 1990s when he benefited from Benjamin's fame and from the fine bibliographic recovery effort of Tom Levin, whose translation of *The Mass Ornament* appeared in 1995." Dudley Andrew, "The Core and the Flow of Film Studies," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Summer 2009): 908.

models by Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, respectively. From the standpoint of film semiotics, represented most prominently by French theorist Christian Metz, cinema was seen primarily as a carrier of meaning and signification. Thus, film theory was understood to discover the medium's intrinsic laws and structures somehow similar to the linguistic analysis of verbal language systems; hence, so-called classical film theory (such as Kracauer's) could not be considered serious theory, if theory at all.

In addition to film semioticians' emphasis on film as a discursive system, further concerns and approaches in analysing and theorising the medium started to emerge in the late 1960s. Influenced by, along with semiotics, psychoanalysis (Lacan, Freud) and Marxist ideology critique (Althusser), this methodological and thematic shift, following the 1968 Paris uprisings, was part of a radical critique of (bourgeois) representation aimed to reveal the (hidden) power structures of capitalist societies. The combination of these theoretical frameworks as applied to cinema would become known as apparatus theory (or *Screen* theory, for its dominance in the eponymous British film journal).[134] Different from the exclusive focus on representation in semiotic approaches, apparatus theorists like Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, among others, shared a critical interest in questions of cinema and its specific circumstances of reception structure the spectator's consciousness.

Roughly, apparatus theory addressed what was seen as the problematic interrelationship between the illusionary impression of reality evoked by the medium, on the one hand, and the technological conditions of film reception, the cinematic apparatus, on the other. The critical examination of both filmic representation and perception was combined with psychoanalytical theories of the unconscious and primary identification, suggesting that the nature of the cinematic apparatus enables the spectator to project their fantasies and desires onto the filmic world, as well as to identify not only with diegetic characters but particularly with the camera eye. Both elements are regarded as manifestations and producers of bourgeois ideology: cinematic representation—images and sounds—was reproached for its apparent naturalness, for concealing its illusionary and ideological character; likewise, the central perspective of film viewing was understood to convey a false feeling of unity, as placing the spectator in an all-powerful position, the well-informed centre of the filmic world.

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[134] See for a collection of influential articles associated with apparatus theory, Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Notwithstanding a shared interest in the psychological effects of film spectatorship, the main preoccupations and implications of Kracauer's material aesthetics and those associated with apparatus theory are rather divergent. As Miriam Hansen suggests, "the psychoperceptual process that Kracauer is concerned with is not one of identification with individual characters and the narrating gaze of the camera but, in a different conscious or subconscious register, a form of mimetic identification that pulls the viewer into the film and dissociates rather than integrates the spectatorial self."[135] Moreover, whereas *Theory of Film* emphasises the medium's potential for (re-)experiences of reality and formations of human subjectivity, conceptions combining ideology-critique and psychoanalysis point to the negative effects of what is seen as cinema's veneering character. Subsequently, both filmic realism and phenomenological-realist notions of the medium came under general suspicion; and even though the condemnations were directed primarily against André Bazin (particularly in *Cahiers du Cinéma*), these new paradigms had a much wider impact. As a consequence, Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, already marginalised, became even more neglected.

Kracauer's peripheral status (and that of his main preoccupations) within film scholarship continued to persist during the 1980s, a decade which saw the advent of so-called neo-formalist or cognitivist approaches. Scholars like David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Noël Carroll proclaimed the departure from what they termed "Grand-Theory," referring to the combination of ideology-critique and psychoanalysis described above. Instead of such conceptualisations, they demanded (and continue to demand) a clear focus on the formal and representational features of the medium. This attitude goes hand in hand with an understanding of film experience as an exclusively cognitive process. The film spectator as a rational reader of the filmic text; such a disembodied notion of cinematic spectatorship could not be further from Kracauer's ideas.

Since the 1990s, after more than two decades of the predominance of semiotic, psychoanalytical and cognitivist theorisations of the medium, there have been several attempts to reclaim film as a material and bodily experience, ranging from Vivian Sobchack's neo-phenomenological reflections on cinema with a strong recourse to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Laura U. Mark's examinations of the medium's tactile qualities, to Steven Shaviro's emphatically non-representational theory of somatic film

[135] Hansen, "Introduction," xxviii.

perception.[136] Furthermore, one can observe a growing re-engagement with questions of cinematic realism over the last two decades, and particularly with the work of André Bazin. In recent publications about this subject matter, however, we can hardly find any reference to Kracauer's material film aesthetics, if it is noticed at all. Consider, for instance, Lúcia Nagib's and Cecília Mello's *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, a collection of essays around the issue of realism. Apart from being mentioned very briefly in the editors' introduction, there is no reference to Kracauer's *Theory of Film* in any of the volume's seventeen articles; more than half of the essays, by contrast, refer to Bazin's writings on cinema.[137]

How can this disparity be explained? Apart from Kracauer's continuing tarnished reputation, a possible reason might lie in the prevailing research foci of Film and Media Studies with regard to realism: first, as discussed above, questions of indexicality have become relevant as a result of the recent technological changes from film to digital; secondly, cinematic realism is often examined in relation to the employment of particular cinematic techniques such as the long take; and third, the emphasis in scholarship on realist auteurs and movements (e.g. Italian Neorealism). All three features are associated, whether always correctly or not, with Bazin's reflections on cinema. Kracauer's film theory, by contrast, seems to be less appropriate for discussions of these subjects; his material aesthetics is neither extremely concerned with semiotic issues nor does the assertion of the medium's realistic tendency rest on specific stylistic choices. Thus, apart from its undeniable historical significance, how can we make use of *Theory of Film* for the examination of contemporary cinema?

The contemporaneity of Kracauer's material aesthetics

In their introduction to *Culture in the Anteroom*, Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke claim that "Kracauer's cultural critique retains its relevance for the present," insisting "on the *contemporaneity* of his work, its potential for invigorating ongoing

[136] Vivian Sobchak, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[137] Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello, eds., *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

debates in the humanities."[138] In accordance with Gemünden's and von Moltke's assessment, I will argue for the continuing relevance of Kracauer's conception of cinema. Film scholar D. N. Rodowick has recently placed Kracauer's *Theory of Film* alongside Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1971), regarding both as examples that exceed the overlapping "genres" of film theory, commonly classified as classical, modern and contemporary. These two monographs, Rodowick suggests,

> stand together in their very different ways as the grand closing gestures on a certain way of thinking about film. And part of their richness, and why they remain compelling works today, is that they represent both the closure of a certain kind of thought and the opening up of new philosophical vistas to which we still have not properly adjusted our vision. They remain, in many ways, untimely works.[139]

According to literary critic Helmut Böttiger, Kracauer's material aesthetics "war in den 20er Jahren auf der Höhe der Zeit, in den 50er Jahren revolutionär—und was dies heute bedeutet, wäre eine Debatte wert."[140]

Notwithstanding the various misapprehensions and the harsh, often unfair, criticism, Kracauer's *Theory of Film* has been raised to the rank of a classic of film theory, a standard reference within Film Studies curricula (which applies also to *From Caligari to Hitler* [1947], Kracauer's socio-psychological study of Weimar cinema's tendency to authoritarianism), being regarded—alongside the writings of Bazin—as *the* personification of realist film theory. But despite (or perhaps because of) his canonical status, for a rather long time *Theory of Film* "languished in relative obscurity,"[141] as Gemünden and von Moltke have observed with respect to Kracauer's work *in toto*. As a consequence, Kracauer, one of Germany's most prolific and significant cultural critics of the 1920s and early 1930s and, in his New York exile, author of two seminal yet controversial monographs on cinema, became an overlooked and, to some extent, even unknown figure, of interest only in relation to his more prominent companions, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno.

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[138] Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke, "Introduction: Kracauer's Legacies," in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 5.

[139] D. N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014), 74. In a similar vein, Adrian Martin considers *Theory of Film* a book that "we are just now learning how to read or re-read," Adrian Martin, *Last Day Every Day: Figural Thinking from Auerbach and Kracauer to Agamben and Brenez* (New York: punctum books, 2012), 21.

[140] Helmut Böttiger, "Das Individuum als einzige Bezugsgröße," *Deutschlandradio*, March 12, 2006, http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/buechermarkt/479260/.

[141] Gemünden and von Moltke, "Kracauer's Legacies," 8.

Although being associated with two of the most influential intellectual circles of the 20th century, the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and the postwar scene of New York left-wing intellectuals, Kracauer was located, as von Moltke and Kristy Rawson suggest in their introduction to *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings*, "on the margins of both movements." [142] Yet despite Kracauer's (relative) standing as an outsider, at least to the extent of academic disciplines and positions, and the emphasis in scholarship on his status of extraterritoriality (which Kracauer himself highlighted in various texts and letters), he can be considered, von Moltke and Rawson further argue, "the missing link between the Frankfurt School and the New York intellectuals," [143] highly influential for intellectual debates in the 20th century.

Over the last twenty-five years, Kracauer's substantial contributions to popular culture, modernity, history and, not least, film and photography have gradually been re-discovered, along with—in the field of cinema—other important figures of so-called classical film theory such as Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs or Jean Epstein. With regard to the 'rehabilitation' of Kracauer's film theory, the greatest credit arguably goes to Miriam Hansen, who has been the first (and the most persistent) in not only defending Kracauer's approach (against the critique of naïve realism described above) but also in contextualising it historically, drawing attention to the continuities and shifts in Kracauer's material aesthetics as well as the different development stages of *Theory of Film*. In addition to her emphasis on historical contextualisation, Hansen has pointed to the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's concerns for contemporary debates, locating Kracauer's idea of the medium, both for its anti-classical elements and its emphasis on the sensory nature of spectatorship, within an "alternative tradition" of film theory, alongside possible 'allies' such as Tom Gunning, Gilles Deleuze or (neo)phenomenological theorists.[144]

For the combination of historical contextualisation with the embedding in contemporary discourse, Hansen's work on Kracauer's conception of cinema has been praised by Johannes von Moltke as a model for a "*historicizing* approach to the classical

[142] von Moltke and Rawson, "Introduction," 12.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 263.

contributions to film theory."[145] According to von Moltke, who has recently followed in the steps of Hansen's pioneering work on Kracauer, such historicizing evaluations of historical texts and writers of film theory can be distinguished from (and should be favoured over) what he considers historicist, ahistorical and presentist approaches (even though these categories, as he acknowledges, are of largely heuristic character). [146] Apart from the strong American scholarship, represented most prominently by Hansen, von Moltke and Thomas Y. Levin (who in 1995 edited and translated *The Mass Ornament*, a collection of Kracauer's Weimar essays), there has also been a significant number of German-language publications dedicated to Kracauer's oeuvre (and particularly his film theory) by scholars including Gertrud Koch, Heide Schlüpmann and Drehli Robnik.

The vast majority of contributions, whether in English or German, follow the historicizing model as promoted by Hansen and von Moltke. My approach to Kracauer's *Theory of Film* builds upon this existing scholarship as well as attempting to explore new avenues, namely to apply his material aesthetics to contemporary cinema. "One objective of a rearticulated form of Kracauerian analysis," as Ian Aitken has suggested, "would appear to be the more substantial application of Kracauer's ideas to particular cases of film analysis." [147] Yet Kracauer's film theory has rarely been taken into consideration with regard to current cinematic approaches. This is what I aim to do in this study: to bring together Kracauer's idea of cinema's redemptive potential to render visible the material world, as set out throughout this chapter, with contemporary realist filmmaking. However, as should be clear by now, I do not consider *Theory of Film* a dogmatic manual of cinematic realism but an open text that raises significant issues about the medium's relationship with reality. Thus, rather than aiming to prove Kracauer's film theory right or wrong, I want to use the book as a toolbox to think through contemporary cinema and the current possibilities for experiences of reality. As case studies, I have chosen films associated with the Berlin School, a group of

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[145] Johannes von Moltke, "Out of the Past: Classical Film Theory," *Screen* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 2014): 401. In fact, as von Moltke recognises, Hansen has promoted the historicizing approach herself. According to her, "historicizing film theory requires both reconstructing a historical horizon for the text-the circumstances of its production, its genealogy and address, the discourses in which it might have intervened-and suggesting constellations in which it raises questions relevant to current concerns. Methodologically, the two approaches cannot be separated."Hansen, "With Skin and Hair," 442.

[146] von Moltke, "Out of the Past," 399.

[147] Ian Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The Nineteenth Century Lukácsian and Intuitionist Realist Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 172.

contemporary German filmmakers whose material approaches strike me as ideally suited for discussions in relation to Kracauer's material aesthetics. The following chapter is thus intended to introduce and contextualise the cinema of the Berlin School.

2 Films from the Berlin School: Material Approaches to Reality

In this second chapter, I introduce a group of contemporary German directors who have become known as the Berlin School, as a way of prefacing closer analyses of selected films associated with this group in the following chapters. As explained above, this study aims to explore the significance of Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* for the examination of contemporary realist cinema. In so doing, I argue for the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's distinctive conception of the medium. For Kracauer, as I have shown in the previous chapter, film possesses the unique potential for (re-)experiences of the material world. But even though this capacity is considered inherent to the medium, it nevertheless depends, in Kracauer's view, on the medium's 'appropriate' use by the filmmaker. Such use involves for Kracauer a strong adherence to the material world. Many films associated with the Berlin School, I suggest, make use of cinema's peculiar properties and possibilities in such a way; they can thus be considered material approaches to reality.

The term 'Berlin School' refers to a group of contemporary German filmmakers, united not by a manifesto or an explicit statement of intent, but by stylistic similarities, as well as by the fact that the majority of them reside in Berlin. The School comprises a group of directors who exchange ideas, work partially together and share similar visions of filmmaking. Reviewers have emphasised the films' proximity to everyday life and their realism. They have also highlighted the School's unorthodox narrative mode and the ambivalent perspectives on reality it opens up. The directors' overall cinematic approach has, moreover, been identified as an "aesthetics of reduction," which manifests itself, as Marco Abel has observed, in "long takes, long shots, clinically precise framing, a certain deliberateness of pacing, sparse usage of extradiegetic music, poetic use of diegetic sound, and, frequently, the reliance on unknown or even non-professional actors who appear to be chosen for who they are rather than for whom they could be."[148]

Though definitely an appropriate description of common aesthetic features among films of the Berlin School, these rather formal criteria, as Abel has correctly

[148] Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2013), 15.

noted, nevertheless do not convey what is most crucial about Berlin School cinema. [149] Certainly, the Berlin School can be defined as a group (including not only directors but also cinematographers, editors etc.) who share a set of aesthetic practices, often diametrically opposed to predominant uses in commercial or mainstream cinema, and which can be seen as part of a global realist tendency. The filmmakers' approach, however, should not be reduced to a list of formal criteria. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate in this study, there can be observed a similar attitude to the material world across the otherwise distinctive works of the filmmakers associated with the Berlin School.

A Brief History of the Term

Let us first consider a brief history of the term 'Berlin School,' from its origins in German film reviews at the beginning of the 2000s to the most recent scholarship on the directors. In journalistic and academic debates on the Berlin School, how has the term been defined? Which directors have been associated with the group? What have been the predominating themes and questions in writings on Berlin School cinema?

The first generation

The label Berlin School can be traced back to 2001, when it first appeared in two reviews of the latest films by Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan. Here, two film critics, Merten Worthmann and Rainer Gansera, refer to the same three directors—alongside Schanelec and Arslan, Christian Petzold—as 'members' of an emerging school and aim to define common aesthetic features among their films. Regardless of differences among the filmmakers, for Worthmann and Gansera there are enough parallels to group them together. In his review of Schanelec's *Mein langsames Leben* (Passing Summer, 2001) in the German weekly *Die Zeit*, Worthmann argues that the three directors make a similar use of space and time. What their films have in common, he moreover suggests, is a certain use of light, and their observational character:

[149] Abel considers "the question of *Deutschland*" central for the filmmakers associated with the Berlin School; "its importance," he suggests, "lies at least as much in its explicitly and implicitly exhibited attitude towards Germany as it lies, as much of the discussion on the Berlin School has it, in any given aesthetic the directors may or may not share to a lesser or greater extent." Ibid., 4.

> Die Liebe zur Ellipse und den Hang zum Abstandhalten teilt Angela Schanelec mit ihren Kollegen Christian Petzold und Thomas Arslan. Alle drei haben an der Berliner Filmhochschule dffb studiert. [...] Wer die Filme dieser 'Berliner Schule' sieht, kann darin einen ganz ähnlichen Umgang mit Raum und Zeit bemerken. In den Bildern scheint, trotz unterschiedlicher Kameraleute, das gleiche Licht zu herrschen - eine Art nüchternes, doch intensives Leuchten. Und auch der Blick auf die eigenen Stoffe ist vergleichbar aus ihm ist alle Behauptung gewichen und in Beobachtung verwandelt.[150]

While Worthmann detects the handling of time and space, the use of light as well as an emphasis on observation (instead of assertion) as common features among the three directors, for Gansera, on the other hand, characterisation is crucial for the way in which these directors' films approach reality. A few weeks after Worthmann's article, Gansera concluded his review of Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* for the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in the following way:

> Immer deutlicher zeichnet sich so etwas wie eine Berliner Schule ab, der Thomas Arslan, Angela Schanelec und Christian Petzold zugehören. Gerade jetzt, wo die drei dabei sind, ihre Eigenheiten auszuformulieren, werden auch ihre Gemeinsamkeiten deutlicher sichtbar. [...] Alle drei wollen die Wirklichkeit weder decouvrieren noch ironisieren. Sie erzeugen—ästhetisch am Gegenpol des Dogma-Vitalismus—Evidenzen, indem sie ihren Figuren Schönheit und Würde verleihen.[151]

According to Gansera, the films of Arslan, Schanelec and Petzold generate self-evidence, which he considers a result of the dignity and beauty the protagonists are endowed with. Taking both reviews together, the term Berlin School can be seen to be understood at this early stage as a group of directors who share a number of aesthetic practices. As a consequence of a certain use of cinematic means and methods, their films allow new phenomenological insights into reality by giving rise to different experiences of time and space.

Following the publication of these two articles, the term Berlin School became increasingly popular among German film critics, so that three years later, in 2004, the label was already mentioned in the latest edition of *Geschichte des Deutschen Films*, the standard work of national film history in the German language. In the chapter on German cinema of the 1990s, Katja Nicodemus presents the three filmmakers as a new generation of auteur cinema in Germany: "Mit ihrer formalen Konsequenz stehen

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[150] Merten Worthmann, "Mit Vorsicht genießen," *Die Zeit*, September 27, 2001, http://www.zeit.de/2001/40/Mit_Vorsicht_geniessen.

[151] Rainer Gansera, "Glücks-Pickpocket," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 3, 2001.

Angela Schanelec, Thomas Arslan und Christian Petzold für eine radikal subjektive, aber gleichwohl nach außen offene Autorenhaltung. Alle drei erschließen dem deutschen Film neue Wirklichkeiten, gerade indem sie darauf bestehen, daß sie sich nur ästhetisch vermitteln lassen."[152] What becomes apparent in Nicodemus's description is that the Berlin School's approach to reality is utterly cinematic and, one could add here, not content-driven. Matters of aesthetics and stylisation, addressed here and which I will examine later in more detail, relate to different notions of both the political and realism. Like Worthmann and Gansera, Nicodemus identifies aesthetic similarities among the films of the three directors. Moreover, by dubbing the directors' cinematic approach "avant-garde," Nicodemus highlights the minority position of Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec, both economically and aesthetically, within the German cinema of the late 1990s:

> Was Schanelec, Arslan und Petzold verbindet, ist ein Kino der Ruhe und lichten Klarheit, in dem es eher um die Intensität und Komposition des einzelnen Moments geht als um Geschichten. Ein Kino, das von den Figuren und ihrer Sprache ausgeht und nicht von einer aufgesetzten Dramaturgie. So ist es auch kein Zufall, daß sich seine drei Regie-Protagonisten auf den französischen Autorenfilm beziehen. Die ästhetische und stilbildende Wirkung ihrer eigenen Arbeiten mag sich zwar umgekehrt proportional zu ihrer wirtschaftlichen Bedeutung verhalten, doch gehören sie zu den wenigen Regisseuren, die in der Filmlandschaft der Endneunziger das Attribut "Avantgarde" verdienen.[153]

Many aspects of what the Berlin School represents are already addressed in the quotes above from Worthmann, Gansera and Nicodemus: a cinema that concentrates on characters and objects and takes them as starting point; the importance of space(s) and local settings; a deceleration of filmic action that provokes a different experience of time, a tendency to observation, elliptical storytelling, a preference for (mundane) details over the dramaturgic whole, a naturalist mode of lighting and sound etc. All these aspects are related to questions of realism, and to Kracauer's distinctive notion of it, and will be part of my deeper analysis of key films in the following chapters. But before coming back to these questions, let us have a look at the institution where this movement has its origins.

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[152] Katja Nicodemus, "Film der Neunziger Jahre: Neues Sein und altes Bewußtsein," in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, and Hans Helmut Prinzler (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2004), 355.
[153] Ibid., 353–54.

The DFFB

The three filmmakers mentioned above—Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec—attended the *Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin* (DFFB) more or less at the same time in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The DFFB, founded in 1966, has arguably been Germany's most important film school in terms of its intellectual agenda and politics, even if the question of the political has been shifted over the years. Already two years after its foundation, a large number of students were expelled from the school in the context of the student movement of 1968. Over the following years, the school established its reputation for explicit political and strongly leftist filmmaking; a number of films made by DFFB graduates in this period can be described as socio-critical, concentrated on workers' spheres. As a consequence, directors such as Christian Ziewer and Max Willutzki became labelled as the 'Berliner Schule des Arbeiterfilms,' which, thanks to its directors' rather content-driven work, distinguished itself from the aesthetic approach of graduates from the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen (HFF) in Munich (Ingemo Engström, Rüdiger Nüchtern, Gerhard Theuring, Matthias Weiss and Wim Wenders, among others), later often referred to as the *Sensibilisten*. Michael Baute et al. have read the diverging approaches of the first Berlin School, on the one hand, and the Munich Group, on the other, "as an inner-filmic continuation of the controversy between the 'political' and the 'aesthetic' left which was which was carried out in the magazine *Filmkritik* from the mid 1960s onwards."[154] In this sense, the current Berlin School, and their aesthetically defined conception of cinema, can arguably be located closer to the *Sensibilisten* than to its institutional predecessors at the DFFB. Certainly, while during the 1970s the DFFB specialised in documentary modes across a broad range, from the beginning of the 1980s on, coinciding with the emergence of video, an aesthetic re-orientation took place at the school: the DFFB's decidedly political direction started to weaken and "the model of the bohemian-artist-intellectual filmmaker"[155] became predominant. The new DFFB hipsters, largely involved in the Punk and New Wave movement, as Stefan Pethke has elaborated in detail, opened the door to more individual forms of expression and experiments with style; an orientation that became

[154] Baute et al., "Collage."
[155] Ibid.

more analytical in the late 1980s under the influence of the next generation.[156] Arslan and Petzold can be numbered among a small group of DFFB students who, influenced by pop theory and interested in larger discourses on cinema's means of expression, organised weekly film screenings and discussions, which, in conjunction with seminars, helped them to develop their own cinematic styles.[157] Just as for the directors of the French New Wave, viewing and discussing films (collectively) belonged together and were seen as fundamental parts of filmmaking. In this context, Arslan and Petzold moreover took up intellectual debates about the medium held in the magazine *Filmkritik*, the most distinguished film magazine in West Germany (1957-1984), modelled on the French *Cahiers du Cinema*. Some of the magazine's former authors had become teachers at the DFFB, among these, Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki, two distinctive documentary filmmakers (both personally affected by the expulsion in 1968), whose approach to images had a great impact on the second Berlin School. This specifically applies to Petzold, who, for instance, considers Bitomsky's documenatary *Der VW-Komplex* (1990) highly influential for his feature *Wolfsburg* (2003).[158] There is an even stronger connection with Farocki, who engaged in important dramaturgy collaborations (in terms of the development of screenplays) in a large number of Petzold's films, and whose influence is most visible in *Yella* (2007), a film aiming to render visible and sensible contemporary forms of capitalism (*Yella* is in many ways a 'sibling' of Farocki's documentary *Nicht ohne Risiko* (*Nothing Ventured*, 2004) on the same theme.[159]

There is however an obvious difference between the Berlin School directors and their former teachers Bitomsky and Farocki. The two generations work in distinct and separate filmic forms: fiction films, on the one hand, and (essayistic) documentaries on the other. Furthermore, Farocki's and Bitomsky's political approach is far more explicit than that of the Berlin School, though the latter's films raise questions of the political as

[156] Stefan Pethke, "Von Wellen und Schulen: Wiederannäherung an Genre durch Poptheorie," in *Die Lust am Genre: Verbrechergeschichten aus Deutschland*, ed. Rainer Rother and Julia Pattis (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2011), 85–99.

[157] See Baute et al., "Collage," and Pethke, "Von Wellen und Schulen." Pethke also refers to Jean-Luc Godard's argument that watching films is the first step of making films.

[158] Christoph Hochhäusler refers to this resemblance as "technological lyricism," in Marco Abel, "Tender Speaking: An Interview with Christoph Hochhäusler," *Senses of Cinema* 42 (March 2007).

[159] See on the influence of Farocki on Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec, Marie Krämer, "Harun Farocki: Lehrer und Mentor der Neuen Berliner Schule," *AugenBlick* 47 (2011): 36–51.

well; a difference that Marco Abel reads as a result of "a different sense and experience of the political":

> Whereas Farocki's and Bitomsky's political "consciousness" is clearly grounded in the circumstances of the 1960s, the Berlin School filmmakers' political awareness strikes me as profoundly affected by a sense of *belatedness*, of having missed or arrived too late for the time when politics in its more traditional, left-radical sense still seemed possible.[160]

Michael Baute et al. are therefore right to emphasise "the affinity between the Berlin School directors of the 1990s and the 'second' Nouvelle Vague generation (Jean Eustache, Philippe Garrel, Jacques Doillon, Maurice Pialat, Benoît Jacquot) through an implicitly shared post-utopian concept of the political which can conceive of social change only as a retreat into the private realm and the cell formations which take place there."[161] In fact, most Berlin School films orientate themselves to the private sphere. If political at all, they do definitely not go along with a more traditional idea of politics; no clear, but rather ambiguous 'statements' are conveyed. In this sense, Ulrich Köhler's polemical essay "Why I don't make 'political' films" can be considered exemplary; he argues against a traditional notion of political cinema overloaded with messages and demands instead that cinema, as art in general, should be produced politically:

> The art that has played an important role in my life is characterized by its openness, ambiguity, its amorality and its refusal to be exploited and functionalized. If art is political, it is political exactly in this: It refuses to be exploited by the daily round of political and social concerns. Its strength lies in its autonomy. Even though this may be an illusion—each artwork is also a market product—it is a necessary utopia for the artist.[162]

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[160] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 10. According to Abel, Berlin School films can be considered political because they are made politically albeit not topical or content-driven; rather, they are particularly political through their aesthetics and affective qualities: "The Berlin School films are politically necessary, not because the directors make "political" films (i.e., message-driven films such as Michael Moore's) but because they make their films politically—because their images do not so much pretend to present some invisible knowledge of some "real" Germany offered up as indispensable insights as points to the future in hopes that the *force* of these images bears enough virtual potential for affecting yet-to-come moments with transformative energy, with the capacity to alter the very reality from within which these images initially emerged." Ibid., 22.

[161] Baute et al., "Collage."

[162] Ulrich Köhler, "Why I Don't Make Political Films," trans. Bettina Steinbruegge, *Cinema Scope*, Spring 2009.

The second generation

As we can see, the term Berlin School initially referred to the DFFB graduates Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec, who have subsequently been described as the group's first generation. Making their first feature-length films in the mid-90s (*Mach die Musik leiser* [Turn the Music Down, 1994, dir. Arslan], *Das Glück meiner Schwester* [My Sister's Good Fortune, 1995, dir. Schanelec] and *Pilotinnen* [Pilots, 1995, dir. Petzold], some years later, their subsequent films—Schanelec's Plätze in Städten (Places in Cities, 1998), Arslan's *Dealer* (1999) and Petzold's *Die innere Sicherheit* (The State I Am In, 2000)—began to be shown in sections of major festivals in Cannes, Berlin and Venice. The films by Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec then served as some kind of model for a number of younger German directors, including Maren Ade, Valeska Grisebach, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler, Maria Speth and Henner Winckler, who have often been referred to as the second generation of the Berlin School. In the early 2000s, these directors made their debut films, among these Grisebach's *Mein Stern* (Be My Star, 2001), Speth's *In den Tag hinein* (The Days Between, 2001), Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002), Winckler's *Klassenfahrt* (Class Trip, 2002), Ade's *Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen* (Forest for the Trees, 2003) and Hochhäusler's *Milchwald* (This Very Moment, 2003), co-written with Heisenberg. On the occasion of the joint cinema release of Winckler's *Klassenfahrt*, Schanelec's *Marseille* as well as Jan Krüger's *Unterwegs* (En Route, 2003) in France, *Cahiers du Cinéma* celebrated the films as part of a *nouvelle vague allemande*. German film critics by contrast have stuck to the label 'Berlin School,' which has also gained acceptance in (international) scholarship.

While the label makes sense in relation to Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec because of their joint education at the DFFB, it is in some ways misleading for the younger directors, who did not study in Berlin but at other film schools around Germany and Austria, though they have all subsequently moved to Berlin. Christoph Hochhäusler, Benjamin Heisenberg and, later on, Maren Ade attended the Film and Television Academy in Munich, Ulrich Köhler and Henner Winckler studied at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, while Valeska Grisebach graduated from the Viennese Film Academy. Through Grisebach, there is also a personal connection to contemporary Austrian directors including Barbara Albert and Jessica Hausner, two of the members of the

production company *coop 99*, and whose films have been considered akin to Berlin School cinema.[163]

The school that isn't one

While common features among the early films of Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec have been read as the emergence of a school, this classification has gained further acceptance since the second generation directors began to be numbered among them. From the mid-2000s on, essays and articles with reference to the Berlin School increased. Significant texts in which the filmmakers are described as a movement include Rüdiger Suchsland's "Langsames Leben, schöne Tage" (2005); the collective assessment of the School, "Berliner Schule—Eine Collage" (2006), Cathy Rohnke's "Die Schule, die keine ist" (2006); Ekkehard Knörer's introduction to the directors on occasion of a London film season, "Luminous Days" (2007); Georg Seeßlen's "Die Anti-Erzählmaschine" (2007); Cristina Nord's evaluation of the movement, "Notizen zur Berliner Schule" (2007); and Marco Abel's distinctive account in "Intensifying Life" (2008), the starting point for Abel's extensive academic work on the Berlin School, which includes single essays as well as interviews conducted with directors, and led to the monograph *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (2013), arguably the most elaborated analysis of this group of filmmakers to date.

But what makes the Berlin School a school? First, it is a common practice to label artistic, philosophical or scientific movements as schools. In the German context, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory may come to mind, perhaps the most prominent example of a school of thought. The most recent case before the Berlin School had been the 'Hamburger Schule,' a characterisation, coined by the leftist music press, for the distinguished approach of Hamburg based indie bands in the late 1980s and 1990s.[164] The label Berlin School, also invented and then frequently used by journalists, not only refers to the DFFB, the educational institution of the three directors, but also asserts a

[163] Due to stylistic similarities, Albert and Hausner have been included into the anthology *Berlin School Glossary*.

[164] Christian Petzold, asked when he first heard the term 'Berlin School', makes the connection to the 'Hamburg School': "Ich hörte damals dauernd Blumfeld, die ja zur sogenannten Hamburger Schule zählten, und dachte: Prima!" in Lars-Olav Beier, "Petzold über die Berliner Schule: 'Deutsche definieren sich über Autos, Reihenhäuser und Bausparverträge,'" *Spiegel Online*, November 23, 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/christian-petzold-ueber-moma-retrospektive-zur-berliner-schule-a-934501.html.

set of shared beliefs and practices among them. Likewise, the authors of the "Collage" essay identify a common concept of cinema, to be seen in the films of—at least—Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec:

> This aesthetic concept forms a system (which is perhaps different from what the filmmakers themselves believe)—a system of concentrated abstention which produces a "reality" of inner movements in representation; and which holds this reality to be the true countenance of the world. One need not agree with these assumptions in order to see that a shared adherence to them will eventually form a "school" whose principles of faith and techniques of producing a very particular image of reality together make up the metaphysics of a phenomenological realism.[165]

What Baute et al. suggest here is that 'school' might be an appropriate term to describe commonalities in Arslan's, Petzold's and Schanelec's cinematic approach. The directors' "phenomenological realism," rooted in "principles of faith and techniques of producing a very particular image of reality," can therefore be seen as foundation for the formation of a school; a key assumption that was discussed at the panel on the contemporary Berlin School held at the DFFB on the occasion of its 40th anniversary in 2006, which was not only attended by Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec but also by many directors of the so-called second generation. The question of whether there is such a thing as a Berlin School, that is a common (aesthetic) approach by Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec and their younger followers, can only become apparent in relation and distinction to other cinema(s), as Baute et al. have further argued in their text written for that event:

> A school is only a "school" by virtue of a shared aesthetics or at least a difference, or a series of differences, which allow one to define the criteria of belonging or non-belonging. One should therefore look for similarities between members of the school and differences to non-members. The shared history (DFFB) and public reception would then be symptomatic of a common ground and would consequently allow for openness towards new members, an openness which becomes visible in the (self) perception of younger directors and their self-proclaimed status as "new-and-so-now-members-too" of the Berlin School.[166]

Despite its popularity, the label Berlin School has however repeatedly been questioned both by critics and the directors themselves, not only, as discussed above, for its partly misleading geographical connotation (in terms of both the second generation's educational institutions and many of the films' locations) but also, and perhaps more seriously, for the term's implied assertion of homogeneity. Reviews of individual Berlin

[165] Baute et al., "Collage."
[166] Ibid.

School films have frequently concentrated on their similarities to other films, or indeed regarded them as contributions to the movement, rather than foregrounding the films' uniqueness; for instance, Arslan's *Ferien,* Petzold's *Yella* and Schanelec's *Nachmittag*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival 2007, were discussed more, as Olaf Möller has noted, in relation to each other than as single films.[167] For American film critic Michael Sicinski, the group is

> not a "school" at all; in many ways it's a retroactive fabrication of critics struggling to get a grip on exciting recent developments in German cinema. This nouvelle vague Allemande, as Cahiers [du Cinema] has more reasonably called it, is a loosely defined group of directors making largely low-budget, experimentally realist art films focusing on late modernist themes of transnationalism, alienation, and spatial dislocation, labour and materialism, and the crisis of consciousness in a diverse, decentered West.[168]

As we can see, there has, then, been much controversy about the term Berlin School. Among directors, there have also been reservations about the label. Ulrich Köhler, for instance, has criticised "the standard speeches on certain 'schools' that don't even exist," demanding instead "an actual confrontation with each film."[169] Even Christoph Hochhäusler, who has arguably been the strongest advocate of a group identity among the directors, has recently stated that "[e]very label carries an expiration date, and to my mind, this one has passed. The films of the last few years have veered further and further apart. Genre and costume films, comedies, and thrillers have tended more and more to defy expectations, a development that I find both necessary and liberating. School is out, and I am eager to see what comes next."[170]

Eric Rentschler, however, has argued that "[f]or all the confusions and misapprehensions it has engendered, the term 'Berlin School' has served quite effectively as a point of reference and a site of coherence and […] common cause, as well as a source of product recognition, an appellation that enables films to accrue meaning within significant creative and constructive constellations."[171] Likewise, Marco

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[167] Olaf Möller, "Das Mögliche machen, so Weiteres möglich machen," *new filmkritik*, July 7, 2007, http://newfilmkritik.de/archiv/2007-07/das-mogliche-machen-so-weiteres-moglich-machen/.
[168] Michael Sicinski, "Once the Wall Has Tumbled: Christian Petzold's Jerichow," Spring 2009.
[169] Köhler, "Why I Don't Make Political Films."
[170] Christoph Hochhäusler, "On Whose Shoulders: The Question of Aesthetic Indebtedness," in *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, ed. Rajendra Roy and Anke Leweke (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 28.
[171] Eric Rentschler, "Predecessors," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 220.

Abel has defended its use, claiming that "the label remains useful because it enables the description and even advocacy of a cinema that otherwise finds itself ignored by a mainstream press that is more concerned with the latest box office numbers than with a challenging its readers to seek out films that actively try to reenvision what German cinema could become."[172]

Yet despite good arguments for keeping this well adopted and catchy label mentioned by Abel and Rentschler, it might nevertheless be worth considering the group of directors a network (rather than a school). In an interview on occasion of the retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in November 2013, Petzold affirms that the Berlin School directors consider themselves a group, "Mal mehr, mal weniger, aber im Grunde schon." He then continues, explaining: "Wir haben uns immer wieder getroffen, um uns Filme anzusehen, auch unsere eigenen. Das waren sehr offene, kritische Gespräche. Klar sind wir keine Wohngemeinschaft. In einer Schule wären wir eher die, die sich am Fahrradständer treffen, um gemeinsam zu rauchen."[173] Petzold's brief remark is striking, not only because it constitutes one of the few thoroughly positive evocations of the notion of a School by one of the directors (apart from Hochhäusler), but even more through his emphasis on the "open, critical conversations," the extensive exchange about films (including their own) among the directors: an aspect that has otherwise remained on the sidelines in examinations of the Berlin School. Moreover, Petzold's half-ironic (self-)location ("smoking together at the bicycle stand") positions the Berlin School directors as a group of mavericks outside of the German film industry and mainstream cinema: an understanding of the group that is actually closer to the notion of a (subculture) scene than an (academic) school.

If we understand the Berlin School as a network of people who share an idea of cinema, not only the above mentioned directors but also other positions in the filmmaking process are of fundamental importance. "Even if we do not share a manifesto," Christoph Hochhäusler has emphasised,

> we are in constant dialogue with each other. Not everyone with everyone else, but it is a lively association. There are also oblivious collaborations. A handful of cameramen (Reinhold Vorschneider, Bernhard Keller, Patrick Orth, Hans Fromm), casting directors (Simone Bär, Nina Haun, Ulrike Müller), editors (Bettina Böhler, Stefan Stabenow) and production designers (Silke Fischer, Kade

[172] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 11.
[173] Christian Petzold in Beier, "Autos, Reihenhäuser und Bausparverträge."

> Gruber, Renate Schmaderer, Beatrice Schultz) have been involved in a majority of films.[174]

Aside from the collaborations mentioned by Hochhäusler, other departments from sound recording (Andreas Mücke-Niesythka, Heino Herrenbrück) to costume design (Anette Guther) have remained in the control of the same few people. At least equally importantly, the films have been produced independently of major production companies. The two-man production company *Schramm Film* can be singled out here, having produced all of Petzold's as well as several films by Arslan, Schanelec and Winckler. In this context, one could also refer to *Peripher*, an independent film distributor (located not far away from Schramm film in the same Berlin district, Kreuzberg), which has released several films from Berlin School directors, alongside the work of like-minded French or Asian filmmakers.

The Matter of Realism

The Berlin School has been seen by scholars and critics both in a national and international context. As a group of directors from the same country, their films have been discussed in relation to and, in some ways, as the successors of the German *Autorenkino* of the likes of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, among others. For Marco Abel, Berlin School films "constitute the first significant (collective) attempt at advancing the a*esthetics* of cinema within German narrative filmmaking since the New German Cinema."[175] Paul Cooke reads the fact that *Revolver* magazine chose Fassbinder for the cover of its first issue as an expression of a certain legacy Hochhäusler and his co-editors want to take up.[176] Moreover, the Berlin School has been considered as a response to the country's predominant cinema of the 1980s

[174] Hochhäusler, "On Whose Shoulders," 27. Even without a group manifesto, there are several texts by Berlin School directors who can help us to define what Berlin School cinema may be concerned with. Indeed, the Berlin School directors are filmmakers for which thinking of and writing about cinema seems to be essential. Many, though not all these essays and interviews have been published in *Revolver*, the magazine founded by Hochhäusler and Heisenberg, among others, in 1998. Here, cinematic approaches and questions of filmmaking with an emphasis on the relation to life and the world around us are discussed with independent international directors. Hochhäusler in particular has been very much engaged in this discourse.

[175] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 10.

[176] Paul Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 74.

and 1990s for which Eric Rentschler coined the term "cinema of consensus." [177] According to Rentschler, most German films in those two decades relied on genre conventions and were dominated by non-political star-driven productions, especially romantic comedies. By producing *Gegenwartsfilme* that take place in the here and now of (mainly German) cities, towns and villages, Berlin School cinema moreover distinguishes itself from the many German films since reunification that deal with the country's past, be it National Socialism (*Nirgendwo in Afrika* [*Nowhere in Africa*, 2001], *Der Untergang* [*Downfall*, 2004], *Sophie Scholl—Die letzten Tage* [*Sophie Scholl—The Final Days*, 2005]), East Germany and reunification (*Das Leben der Anderen* [*The Lives of Others*, 2006] *Good Bye, Lenin!* [2003]) or left terrorism in former West Germany (*Der Bader Meinhof Komplex* [The Baader Meinhof Komplex, 2008]).[178]

The Berlin School can not only be located outside of the German film establishment aesthetically, but also economically and politically. Most Berlin School films have struggled to find more than 10,000 viewers in theatrical screenings in Germany; only Petzold's *Die innere Sicherheit* (The State I Am In, 2001) and *Barbara* (2012) as well as Maren Ade's *Alle Anderen* (Everyone Else, 2009) have attracted more than 100,000 viewers. This minority position is also expressed in the fact that no director associated with the group has joined the German Film Academy, a private institution found in 2003 and modelled after the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which in 2005 took over the awarding of the LOLA, the most prestigious and lucrative German Film award.[179] In this sense, the Berlin School can be considered a (national) counter-cinema, a movement that has given rise to "the incursion of reality

[177] Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 260–77.

[178] These 'heritage films' have brought German Cinema accolades and awards and regained international attention over the last ten to 15 years, including two Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film for *Nirgendwo in Afrika* in 2002 and *Das Leben der Anderen* in 2006 as well as nominations for *Der Untergang* (Downfall, 2004), *Sophie Scholl* (2005) and *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*. Furthermore, *Das Leben der Anderen*, G*ood Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (Head On, 2004) won the European Film Award. Except for *Gegen die Wand*, for which Akin also won the Golden Bear for the Best Film at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival, all these films depict the above mentioned periods and subjects of the past. These awarded films other than *Gegen die Wand* are characterised by a rather conventional form of aesthetics and storytelling.

[179] Berlin School cinema has subsequently become the target of polemic critique from film industry and mainstream media. See Marco Abel, "22 January 2007: Film Establishment Attacks 'Berlin School' as Wrong Kind of National Cinema," in *A New History of German Cinema*, ed. Jennifer Kapczynski and Michael Richardson (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2012), 602–8.

into the German Film,"[180] as Christoph Hochhäusler has remarked with reference to Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow*.

Realism: a global tendency

However, Berlin School cinema cannot be understood solely in national terms. In 2008, American film critic A. O. Scott introduced a new generation of independent US filmmakers, including Kelly Reichardt and Ramin Bahrani, to the readers of the *New York Times*. With reference to Italian Neorealism, Scott presented this new American wave as part of a global "neo-neo realist" trend in contemporary cinema including the Dardenne brothers from Belgium as well as Iranian, Korean and Romanian filmmakers. For Scott, the rediscovery of realist filmmaking is a response to the ideological paradigm of illusion:

> For most of the past decade, magical thinking has been elevated from a diversion to an ideological principle. The benign faith that dreams will come true can be hard to distinguish from the more sinister seduction of believing in lies. To counter the tyranny of fantasy entrenched on Wall Street and in Washington as well as in Hollywood, it seems possible that engagement with the world as it is might reassert itself as an aesthetic strategy. Perhaps it would be worth considering that what we need from movies, in the face of a dismaying and confusing real world, is realism.[181]

Even though not mentioned in Scott's article, the Berlin School directors can be situated within this global movement, as they have positioned themselves as opposed to mainstream cinema's manipulative methods. For Christoph Hochhäusler, "there is always the utopian desire for liberation, from dependence, in the sense of the Enlightenment, and this is pretty much the antipode to the cinema of seduction that the Americans are practicing, if one wants to simplify the matter in this way." [182] Hochhäusler's remark draws attention to the (apparent) opposition between European Art cinema and Hollywood. As Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out,

> European art/auteur cinema (and by extension, world cinema) has always defined itself against Hollywood on the basis of its greater realism. Whether one thinks of Italian neorealism, the French *nouvelle vague's semi*-documentary *cinéma vérité*, or Ingmar Bergman's clinically probing psychological realism: our

[180] Quoted in Cathy Rohnke, "The School That Isn't One—Reflections on the 'Berlin School,'" *Goethe.de*, December 2006.
[181] A. O. Scott, "Neo-Neo Realism," *The Times Magazine*, March 22, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/22/magazine/22neorealism-t.html?fta=y&pagewanted=all.
[182] Christoph Hochhäusler in Abel, "Tender Speaking."

> notions of non-Hollywood filmmaking are generally tied to some version of realist aesthetics.[183]

As suggested by Elsaesser, these varieties of realist aesthetics, though originally associated with European cinema, can indeed be observed across the globe. In his contribution to the *Berlin School Glossary*, "Eclectic Affinities," Gerd Gemünden describes the Berlin School as part of a realist trend in international independent filmmaking, quoting Benjamin Heisenberg's remark on Michel Franco's *Daniel y Ana* (*Daniel and Ana*, 2009): "It is interesting how Mexican cinema makes use of a style which we in Germany would label 'Berliner Schule,' but which is obviously simply an internationally accepted form of storytelling, of a certain perspective on reality, and of dealing with the viewer."[184] Gemünden moreover suggests shared similarities between Berlin School films and the work of directors from Mexico (Fernando Eimbcke), Argentina (Lucrecia Martel, Lisandro Alonso), the United States (Kelly Reichardt) and Thailand (Apichatpong Weerasethakul). Likewise, Christoph Hochhäusler argues that the Berlin School films should be seen within the context of international filmmaking: "It is misleading to stress the Germanness of this movement [i.e., the Berlin School]."[185] Indeed, Berlin School directors are not only "in dialogue with Hollywood,"[186] as Jaimey Fisher has claimed of Christian Petzold's work with American genre cinema, but also with film(maker)s from other countries and continents; take, for instance, the references in Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* to films by Maurice Pialat and Eric Rohmer, or the allusion to the cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul in Ulrich Köhler's *Schlafkrankheit* (Sleeping Sickness, 2011).

As further essential influences, in addition to those above, Robert Bresson and Michelangelo Antonioni, the directors of the 'second' Nouvelle Vague generation, have been mentioned by critics, as well as various contemporary Asian filmmakers (Hsiao-hsien Hou, Sang-Soo Hong), among others. In fact, these international filmmakers seem to have left a stronger mark on the outlook of Berlin School cinema than any German director. As Christoph Hochhäusler has suggested,

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[183] Thomas Elsaesser, "World Cinema: Realism, Evidence, Presence," in *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, ed. Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

[184] Gerd Gemünden, "Eclectic Affinities," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 101.

[185] Quoted in ibid.

[186] Jaimey Fisher, "German *Autoren* Dialogue with Hollywood? Refunctioning the Horror Genre in Christian Petzold's *Yella*," in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 186–203.

> Our own national influences, I feel, pale by comparison at least in terms of conscious quotation from, say, the New German Cinema of the 1970s—which does not mean that Fassbinder & Co. play no role. But, in terms of genealogy, I don't think they constitute the main branch.[187]

Yet despite these international affiliations, as Eric Rentschler has argued, "various domestic forces and energies, even if they surely cannot be seen as fully defining its ultimate shape, figured crucially in the formation of the Berlin School." [188] For Rentschler, these include, first, the significance of the magazine *Filmkritik* and its observations on film. This conjunction of filmmaking and thinking of/writing on film served as a role model for *Revolver*, co-founded in 1998 by two Berlin School directors, Benjamin Heisenberg and Christoph Hochhäusler, among others. In addition, Rentschler mentions the legacy of the DFFB as well as various strands of realist filmmaking within German cinema.

Thus both local and global influences have played a role in shaping the Berlin School, a group which has largely been considered in academic scholarship and film criticism a realist project. For critic Hanns-Georg Rodek, "reality is the key to the Berlin School."[189] Sabine Hake situates the directors within the tradition of filmic realism and auteur filmmaking, since the group "has attracted special attention because of their belief in film as a medium with a unique ability to create reality effects and illuminate social reality."[190] Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood suggest that in Berlin School films "we find a rediscovery of a Bazinian notion of realism with its emphasis on long takes and deep focus."[191] Cooke, moreover, describes the Berlin School as "a group of artists [...] who are amongst a number of contemporary filmmakers currently exploring new forms of cinematic realism."[192]

However, the classification of Berlin School cinema as realist has been challenged, mostly through an assertion that the pronounced stylisation of Berlin School films does not correspond with (certain) concepts of realism. According to Marco Abel, one should

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[187] Hochhäusler, "On Whose Shoulders," 25.
[188] Rentschler, "Predecessors," 214.
[189] Hanns-Georg Rodek, "Die fetten Jahre der Berliner Schule," *Die Welt*, November 16, 2006, http://www.welt.de/kultur/ article94501/Die_fetten_Jahre_der_Berliner_ Schule.html.
[190] Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), 206.
[191] Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood, "Introduction," ed. Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 7.
[192] Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema*, 5.

> not reduce these films to the documentary-like moniker that is so often used to describe films that call in the services of so-called realism. [...] If anything, though, the Berlin School's aesthetic is more akin to what Bazin defined as "true realism": these films are too obviously *stylized* by means of camera movement and mise-en-scène to be described as documenting reality.[193]

I concur with Abel's remarks about the tendency to stylisation in Berlin School cinema; however, I question in the course of this thesis his assertion of the contradiction between style and realist approach. Abel's argument is significant insofar as it refers to the problematic nature of the discourse on cinematic realism, a term under which a number of different theoretical concepts and aesthetic practices coexist. First, we need to keep apart two very different ideas and practices of cinematic realism. As Susan Hayward has pointed out,

> There are, arguably, two types of realism with regard to film. First, seamless realism, whose ideological function is to disguise the illusion of realism. Second, aesthetically motivated realism, which attempts to use the camera in a non-manipulative fashion and considers the purpose of realism in its ability to convey a reading of reality, or several readings even. As far as the seamless type of realism is concerned, film technique—supported by narrative structures—erases the idea of illusion, creates the "reality effect."[194]

Certainly, there is no question that the Berlin School director's attitude can be classified as 'aesthetically motivated realism,' an approach that is diametrically opposed to what Hayward terms 'seamless realism' (labeled elsewhere as Classical Hollywood realism). Moreover, as film critic Frieda Grafe has suggested, realism in film always implies a certain style: hence the prefixes "neo-, sur-, super-, hyper-realism" etc.[195] Noel Carroll makes a similar point in *Theorizing the Moving Image*: "Because 'realism' is a term whose application ultimately involves historical comparisons, it should not be used unprefixed—we should speak of Soviet realism, Neorealism, Kitchen sink or Super realism. None of these developments strictly correspond to or duplicate reality, but rather make pertinent (by analogy) aspects of reality absent from other styles."[196]

Marco Abel moreover considers the films of the Berlin School as distinguished from representational forms of realism because of their orientation towards the

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[193] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 16 (emphasis in original).
[194] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 311.
[195] Frieda Grafe, "Realismus ist immer Neo-, Sur-, Super-, Hyper-: Sehen mit fotografischen Apparaten," in *Film/Geschichte: Wie Film Geschichte anders schreibt*, ed. Enno Patalas (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 2004), 45–53.
[196] Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 244.

unfamiliar: hence they are "involved in inventing—or at least experimentally developing—an *arepresentational realism*."[197] Taking a cue from Gilles Deleuze and Theodor W. Adorno, and their plea for the autonomy of the image, Abel argues that Berlin School cinema creates new forms of reality, rather than simply representing it. These films, he argues,

> confront (German) audiences with new images of the country and its people that are narratively and aesthetically rendered so that they suspend viewers' ability immediately to recognize, and thus reduce to their own preconceived notions, what these films depict. Consequently, these filmmakers do not ask the audience to judge the representational veracity of what they show against a set of pre-formed images of Germany derived from standardized media representations of the country; rather, the Berlin School films tend to force audiences to come to terms with the demand to *re-see* that with which they assumed sufficient familiarity: *Deutschland* itself.[198]

"By affirming the image as image," Abel further suggests, "the Berlin School films thus effectively transform reality, forcing viewers to engage the seemingly familiar as something unfamiliar while never alienating us from what we see."[199] I agree with Abel's comments about Berlin School cinema's affinity with unknown aspects of reality. But it is also possible to consider that affinity not, as Abel does, in relation to Deleuzian concepts of the autonomy of the image, but rather to Kracauer's film theory, and his idea of the estranging character of cinematic representation. For Kracauer, as described in the previous chapter, film renders visible the unfamiliar in the familiar, the extraordinary in the ordinary, opening up new perspectives on aspects of the material world. There are also grounds for scepticism over what Abel calls the a-representational character of Berlin School cinema. Berlin School films, as I seek to show in this thesis, do not go beyond representation, despite their notable attempt to avoid clichés (of cinematic representation). The assertion of the a-representational character (the autonomy vis-á-vis pro-filmic reality) easily misses the films' strong adherence to the material world.

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[197] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 19.
[198] Ibid., 15.
[199] Marco Abel, "Intensifying Life: The Cinema of the 'Berlin School,'" *Cineaste*, Fall 2008, http://www.cineaste.com/articles/the-berlin-school.htm.

Material realism

In their collective "Collage" essay, Michael Baute et al. outline the main elements of the Berlin Schools' directors' material-realist approach:

> Realism is at once program and form. It is not sufficient to hope that reality will easily materialise in representation. In this case, a realistic position entails an adherence to people and things as they are, it entails verism. If one were to formulate the topmost commandment of the Berlin School, it would consist of a proscription of manipulation—of reality and of the observer. From this, everything else follows: a commitment to observation, a prohibition of intervention (which could also mean intervening against false interventions), a concept of representation which wishes to cure actors of acting, the camera of autonomy, montage of becoming authoritarian and narration of lapsing into topoi and clichés. Almost throughout, extra-diegetic music as a means of underscoring images is regarded as illegitimate: original sound. It is the world that should appear: original world. Reality is fetish, its fair representation is "beauty."[200]

As Baute et al. suggest, the proscription of manipulation is central to Berlin School cinema. Yet, the directors do not believe in the simple reproducibility of reality by the film camera, but in constructions of reality that follow a particular pattern or mode of representation. In this way, they dissociate themselves from filmmakers "with a rather simplistic belief in the immediacy of the rescue of reality in film."[201] Consequently, according to Baute et al., the School's aesthetic program can be described as "second order authenticity":

> One must lie in wait for the real reality which is visible only in the inner movements of things. The cinema is the apparatus with which one can track down these inner movements of things and people (who are just a special instance of things with a life of their own). The cinema is the machine of the phenomenological opening towards the world but this is only possible if it restrains itself to the greatest extent. What is needed is a moment of pause, a bracketing of the "natural setting," a working against convention. The films of the Berlin School bear the signs of this endeavour. One senses (at least in the films of Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec) the effort required by it. One realises that it is hard to refrain from arranging the visible. One could also say that it is impossible. One could say that it is impossible. In this sense, the verism of the Berlin School stems from a "second order authenticity."[202]

This description of the filmic medium as "the apparatus with which one can track down inner movements of things and people" as well as "the machine of the

[200] Baute et al., "Collage."
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.

phenomenological opening towards people" recalls Kracauer's phenomenological approach to cinema. Here Baute et al. obviously, albeit implicitly, link the School's aesthetic programme to Kracauer's film theory. However, the labelling of the Berlin School films' approach to reality as "second order authenticity" points to contradictions in the filmic process, and to the fact that the cinematic representation of reality is not equal to reality itself. On the one hand, the camera allows an immediate representation of pro-filmic events, as highlighted by Kracauer as well as Bazin. This is the 'documentary' aspect of the medium. Immediacy, on the other hand, is questioned by Baute et al.'s reference to such (audio)visual arrangements as framing, camera movements and lighting: the aesthetic composition of the image.

As I will show in this study, the Berlin School directors are aware of both the chances and pitfalls of the immediacy of the image. Hence their programme can perhaps best be described as what Baute et al. have termed "reflective realism."[203] It is also, as Eric Rentschler has hinted, centrally related to Kracauer's conception of the medium in *Theory of Film*. As Rentschler suggests,

> This cinema of observation and nonintervention is […] marked by Siegfried Kracauer's initiative to redeem physical reality. Like that of the late Kracauer, its understanding of realism is reflexive and self-conscious; for the exponents of the Berlin School, reality is produced, not given, shaped by the forces of nature but every bit as strongly determined by history and human agency.[204]

In Kracauer's reflective notion of cinema, the artistic use of cinematic techniques and devices (e.g. camera movement, framing and mise-en-scène) is not contrary to the realist approach as long it avails itself of the material world. Accordingly, the Berlin School directors' material realism lies precisely in bringing together form and content, style and document. In the following chapters, Berlin School cinema's material approaches to reality will be further discussed by looking closely at selected films.

[203] Ibid.
[204] Rentschler, "Predecessors," 213.

3 Recorded and Constructed: The Ambiguous Character of Physical Reality

> Does the spectator ever succeed in exhausting the objects he contemplates? There is no end to his wanderings. Sometimes, though, it may seem to him that, after having probed a thousand possibilities, he is listening, with all his senses strained, to a confused murmur. *Images begin to sound, and sounds are again images*. When the intermediate murmur—the murmur of existence—reaches him, he may be nearest to the unattainable goal.
>
> SIEGFRIED KRACAUER[205]

What is highlighted in Kracauer's statement, taken from *Theory of Film*'s chapter on spectatorship, is the material and imaginative nature of the film experience. Rather than being defined by meaning and content, filmic images and sounds are understood primarily as material phenomena that allow a particular experience of reality. As described in the first chapter, for Kracauer cinema offers sensory and dream-like journeys to the material world, which, in turn, trigger the spectator's involuntary associations, memories and fantasies. But in order to achieve this potential, it is important that the objects displayed on screen are of ambiguous and open character.

In this chapter, I take Kracauer's notion of cinema's potential for experiences of the material world as a starting point for the examination of Berlin School films' aesthetic approaches to reality, on both the visual and auditory level. From the discussion of chapter 1, we know that photographic media, in Kracauer's view, distinguish themselves from the traditional arts by their peculiar relation to raw material. Film, due to its photographic nature, he argues, can be seen as "uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality and, hence, gravitates towards it."[206] Starting from the medium's recording and revealing qualities, Kracauer emphasises the redemptive potential that lies in the intermediary encounter with "the transitory world we live in,"[207] yet he points out that "in order to make us experience physical reality, films must show what they picture."[208] This rather cryptic remark draws attention to the

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[205] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 165 (emphasis added).
[206] Ibid., 28. "Physical reality," as Kracauer explains, "will also be called 'material reality,' or 'physical existence,' or 'actuality,' or loosely just 'nature.' Another fitting term might be 'camera-reality.' Finally, the term 'life' suggests itself as an alternate expression." Ibid., 28–29.
[207] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 28.
[208] Ibid., 300.

fact that cinema's exclusive possibilities result from its major concern with material (rather than "mental") reality, a capability which, according to Kracauer, is always at risk of filmmakers turning their films into either (traditional) art or ideology.

Moments of redemption, however, do not simply materialise but depend on the appropriate use of cinematic techniques and devices. Indeed, Kracauer's conception of the medium goes beyond the idea of filmic images as mere recordings of pro-filmic reality. For Kracauer, as Miriam Hansen has suggested,

> the specificity of film is rooted empathetically in its photographically based ability to "record and reveal physical reality" […], and he offers a vast catalogue of functions, "inherent affinities," and objects […] to illustrate his claim. But, as Kracauer well knows, film's "affinity" with the "transitory world we live in" is an "elective" one […]: It has to be translated into an aesthetic effect by means of cinematic techniques such as framing and editing; the "potentialities" of the medium can only be implemented through particular stylistic choices.[209]

As suggested by Hansen, Kracauer is fully aware of the filmmaker's contributions to the medium's experience of physical reality, hence the constructedness of filmic images. Film is not only capable of capturing the peripheral world of material phenomena in front of the camera but also always, at the same time, of generating a particular view of and, by extension, 'ear' onto this world.

Yet, for Temenuga Trifonova there remains an "obvious incongruity between [*Theory of Film's*] subtitle—*The Redemption of Physical Reality*—and the title of the book's third chapter, which examines the specific features of the cinematic medium: 'The Establishment of Physical Existence.' Although Kracauer considers his work a defence of cinematic realism," Trifonova argues that "it is a realism concerned not with the simple representation or recording of reality but rather with the 'establishment' or invention of reality. Physical existence is not given but has to be 'established.'" [210] Trifonova's remark is significant insofar as it draws attention to a certain ambivalence in Kracauer's notion of physical reality. In stark contrast to the longstanding (mis)understanding of Kracauer's idea of cinema's peculiar relation to the material world as naïve, Trifonova, similarly to Miriam Hansen's lucid readings of *Theory of Film* (see above and chapter 1), makes us aware of the book's modernist tendencies. Her essay ends with a revaluation of Kracauer's notion of realism:

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[209] Hansen, "Introduction," ix.

[210] Temenuga Trifonova, "The Fantastic Redemption of Physical Reality," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23, no. 1 (2006): 56.

> It is necessary to reconsider Kracauer's understanding of "realism." Perhaps realism does not presuppose the terminal neutralization of signification for the sake of purely indexical relation to phenomena, but rather involves the rendering of phenomena indeterminate and indefinite, random and episodic. […] Kracauer's realism, then, should be approached not as an attack on signification but rather as a warning against oversignification. Realism is defined in negative terms: it is a kind of self-restraint the filmmaker must exercise in the face of oversignification. Realism is possible only as 'step back' from oversignification. The attempt to be realistic is always circumscribed by the always already present danger of symbolism or montage. The task of cinema is not to strip phenomena from signification but rather to render their signification indeterminate.[211]

Trifunova's reconsideration of Kracauer's conception of the medium is more than accurate. If films really show what they picture, as Kracauer has formulated in the statement above, then the status of material phenomena recorded by the camera will be left ambiguous and indeterminate.

In *Theory of Film*, the open and ambiguous character of visible phenomena is addressed explicitly in a chapter entitled "Inherent Affinities," a term with which Kracauer, in addition to the recording and revealing functions, attempts to grasp the specific characteristics of the filmic medium in its relation to the material world. Kracauer identifies five such inherent affinities: the unstaged, the fortuitous, the endless, the indeterminate and the 'flow of life.'[212] While film shares the first four affinities with photography, the so-called flow of life can be considered the singular virtue of cinema (for its ability of rendering the world in motion). For Kracauer, this concept, also referred to as the continuum of life, "covers the stream of material situations and happenings with all that they intimate in terms of emotions, values, thoughts. The implication is that the flow of life is predominantly a material rather than a mental continuum, even though, by definition, it extends into the mental dimension."[213]

For this present study, Kracauer's emphasis on film's affinity with indeterminacy is of particular importance. Without denying the often culturally defined significance of material phenomena such as facial expressions, landscapes or colours, Kracauer insists

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[211] Ibid., 77.

[212] For Janet Harbord, these inherent affinities can be subsumed under the idea of contingency, a concept which she considers "arguably the most significant" in *Theory of Film*. Though "[r]arely cited in the text itself," Harbord suggests, "it rather defines the paradigm within which Kracauer's critical concepts reside, those of indeterminacy, the fortuitous, the endless and the accidental." *Janet Harbord, "Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory of Film* and the Trope of the Accidental," *New Formations* 61 (Summer 2007): 90.

[213] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 71.

on their potential indefinability, suggesting that the context in which such objects appear on screen have a great impact on how they are actually perceived. By drawing attention to film's ability to "change their apparently fixed meaning within changing contexts,"[214] Kracauer not only stresses the independence of material phenomena and the plurality of their possible meanings but also points to the potential of the experience that results from such allusiveness. In fact, Kracauer's main concern is not with the indeterminate status of filmic images as such but rather with the possibilities of the medium to initiate interconnections between the phenomena on screen and the spectator's mind, a two-way process which he terms "psychophysical correspondences," referring to "the more or less fluid interrelations between the physical world and the psychological dimension."[215]

For Kracauer, the indeterminate character of filmic images manifests itself by "incorporat[ing] raw material with its multiple meaning."[216] Accordingly, films should, in his view, "integrate shots of indistinct meaningfulness into a narrative"[217] in order to lead space for imagination and "invite the audience to absorb their manifold connotations."[218]

> Notwithstanding their latent or ultimately even manifest bearing on the narrative to which they belong, all these shots are more or less free-hovering images of material reality. And as such they also allude to contexts unrelated to the events which they are called upon to establish. Their cinematic quality lies precisely in their allusiveness, which enables them to yield all their psychological correspondences.[219]

As a consequence, films with an affinity for the ambiguous material world "evoke a reality more inclusive than the one they actually picture."[220]

Kracauer's plea against (over)signification, moreover, is not only of importance in relation to the image but also relates to matters of sound. Undeniably, Kracauer is preoccupied primarily with cinema's particular qualities as a *visual* medium, and *Theory of Film* almost exclusively focuses on characteristics related to the image. According to Gertrud Koch, as I have noted before, the "idea of rendering things visible […] contains

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[214] Ibid., 68.
[215] Ibid., 69.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid., 70.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 71.
[220] Ibid.

the philosophical concept behind the entire book."[221] Or, as Helmut Lethen puts it, visibility [*Sichtbarkeit*] can be regarded as Kracauer's "love doctrine" [*Liebeslehre*].[222] Indeed, for Kracauer "the supremacy of the image" (over sound) is irrefutable: "For sound films to be true to the basic aesthetic principle, their significant communications must originate with their pictures."[223]

Yet despite this clear focus, Kracauer's material approach to cinema is not limited to the visual level but also takes account of sound. In fact, Kracauer's 'problem' with sound—or rather, with language, the spoken word—derives from a concern that cinema could abandon its "natural properties" (its concentration on material reality) and instead develop into a copy of theatre, centred on bourgeois concepts and the human subject. In the chapter entitled "Dialogue and Sound," Kracauer thus argues for a reduction of speech, favouring films that stress language's physical qualities rather than its meanings. His preference for the non-signifying aspects of acoustic phenomena is even more emphasised when it comes to what is called sound proper, "meaning exclusively noises."[224] As Helmut Lethen explains,

> Wenn "Geräusch" für die Semiotik eine relativ globale Umschreibung für ein Phänomen ist, daß sich in eine ganze Skala von Differenzierungen auffalten läßt, so müssen wir vorerst feststellen, dass Kracauers Aufwertung zum sinnfernsten Pol der Skala tendiert und sich auf ein Horchen auf bedeutungsferne Laute einstellt. Er will die Aufmerksamkeit auf die "stoffliche Qualität" des Geräuschs lenken, die noch nicht von einem Sinnsystem aufgezehrt ist.[225]

Lethen's (slightly ironic) description draws attention to Kracauer's preoccupation with the material rather than representational character of noise. This material understanding of sounds (including the human voice) goes hand in hand with the general approach of *Theory of Film*; noises thus form "das akustische Äquivalent zu dem Gestrüpp insignifikanter optischer Zeichen, das die Kamera einfangen sollte." [226] Kracauer's notion of physical reality, film's capacity to record and reveal the material world, primarily applied to the image, is therefore relevant for the auditory level as well. As a consequence, the question in relation to this study must be not only "What is

[221] Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 96.
[222] Lethen, "Sichtbarkeit."
[223] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 103.
[224] Ibid., 124.
[225] Lethen, "Sichtbarkeit," 206.
[226] Ibid.

rendered visible?" but likewise "What is rendered audible?" in Berlin School cinema's approaches to the material world.

The Proscription of Manipulation

Things are there. Why manipulate them?
ROBERTO ROSSELLINI[227]

Let us first remind ourselves of the description of the Berlin School's realist approach as given in the "Collage" essay by Michael Baute et al.: "Realism is at once program and form. It is not sufficient to hope that reality will easily materialise in representation. In this case, a realistic position entails an adherence to people and things as they are, it entails verism. If one were to formulate the topmost commandment of the Berlin School, it would consist of a proscription of manipulation—of reality and of the observer. From this, everything else follows […]."[228] This notion of cinematic verism, based on "a proscription of manipulation," will serve here as a starting point for the exploration of Berlin School cinema.

But what does it mean not to manipulate if every single photographic image is constructed and mediated (and in this sense also manipulated)? According to director Dominik Graf (who has often commented rather critically on Berlin School cinema), the Berlin School directors' use of the medium should be understood as a response to the manipulative strategies in prevalent Hollywood cinema. This is how Graf explains the filmmakers' insistence on the necessity "to open one's eyes and ears again in a rather basic way in order *just* to see and hear and nothing else: no music, no moving of the camera wildly to and fro, but just to see and hear an image."[229] The cinema of the Berlin School is thus best be described as a counter-approach to what Thomas Arslan has called the "dramaturgy of overbearance" [*Überwältigungsdramaturgie*].[230]

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[227] Quoted in James Quandt, "Myth and Manipulation," in *Roberto Rossellini's War Trilogy booklet* (The Criterion Collection, 2009), 12.
[228] Baute et al., "Collage."
[229] Dominik Graf in Marco Abel, "'I Build a Jigsaw Puzzle of a Dream-Germany': An Interview with German Filmmaker Dominik Graf," *Senses of Cinema* 55 (September 2010).
[230] Quoted in Rainer Tittelbach, "Ferien," *tittelbach.tv*, http://www.tittelbach.tv/programm/fernsehfilm/artikel-1834.html.

In line with the notion that the realism of the Berlin School is both programme and form, as suggested in the quote above by Baute et al., the films I have selected for this chapter—Angela Schanelec's *Marseille*, Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* and Christian Petzold's *Gespenster*—can be seen as a refusal of the manipulative character of cinematic conventions, including the use of lighting and sound, as they set themselves against a cinema based on identification, seduction and overbearance, even though the actual shaping of this approach does differ. However, the Berlin School films' approaches to reality do not only rest on the idea of leaving the recorded "raw material more or less intact," as Kracauer (as well as Bazin) have famously defined the characteristics of photographic media in marked contrast to other mimetic arts. It also involves a strong awareness of cinematic forms of representation. Yet despite this awareness, the films do not work against the material that is given to them by the world. Thus, the realism of the Berlin School, as Baute et al. have further pointed out, can be considered self-conscious, a cinematic attitude that involves "interventions against false interventions."[231] It is therefore important not only to focus on the use of certain practices but also draw attention to the directors' deliberate avoidance of conventional cinematic techniques and devices.

If the assertion of Berlin School cinema's approach as non-manipulative is accurate in terms of the image, it seems even more valid with regard to sound. Most strikingly, this attitude manifests itself in the near avoidance of extra-diegetic music as accompaniment for the image. In mainstream cinema, apart from soundtracks full of extra-diegetic pop songs, empathetic compositions predominate. Berlin School directors, by contrast, refuse to use sound for the simple purpose of triggering emotions: a manipulative technique dubbed by Christian Petzold as "music of overbearance" [*Überwältigungsmusik*].[232] In fact, most Berlin School directors seem to share Robert Bresson's attitude towards music in film: "No music as accompaniment, support or reinforcement. *No music at all.* Except, of course, the music played by visible instruments."[233]

Instead of overloading the image with opulent scores, Berlin School directors put their faith in original sound, a method less motivated by the aim of purity or immediacy

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[231] Baute et al., "Collage."
[232] Quoted in Burkhard Reinartz, "Mit den Ohren sehen: Die Soundwelt des Kinos," *Deutschlandradio*, February 10, 2013.
[233] Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 10.

but rather, as part of a phenomenological adherence to the surface of things, an attempt to render audible the material world. Thus, in addition to the phenomena visible within the image, the materiality of the audible world is brought into play, its sonic surfaces, we might say. In this way, sound is not subjugated to the image but becomes an (autonomous) element in its own right. Moreover, as I hope to demonstrate in the film analyses that follow, the ambient sounds recorded and revealed in Berlin School cinema, from traffic noises to natural sounds, are mostly chosen, in accordance with Kracauer's materialism, for their physical qualities rather than their (symbolic) meanings. As a consequence, the potential representational character of sound is downplayed; what is highlighted, instead, is the materiality of phenomena, which, in turn, produces ambiguity, a multiplicity of possible meanings. In this context, the reduction of language is also relevant. Aside from thematic motivations, as Claudia Breger suggests, the minimal dialogue in Berlin School films should be seen in context of "their aesthetic techniques of bracketing social as well as psychological explanatory narratives altogether, and focussing instead on the phenomena directly visible on screen."[234]

Angela Schanelec's *Marseille*: Aesthetics of Normality

For Dominik Graf, this tendency to visual and sonic materialism is most evident in Angela Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), which he considers "in this regard a milestone of a film." [235] In an email-exchange with Christian Petzold and Christoph Hochhäusler, Graf has pointed to the film's use of original sound and image:

> Man kann förmlich zuschauen, wie die Silberkörnchen des Filmmaterials auf die Stadt reagieren, auf dem Negativ sich eindrücken oder von den schwarzen Stellen unbelichtet bleiben. Kaum Story, nur wundervoller O-Ton und gleichsam O-Bild, und dazu nur die Andeutung einer Biographie und ein Windhauch von Konflikten. [236]

Marseille, Angela Schanelec's fourth full-length feature, premiered at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival in the section 'Un certain regard,' her second invitation to the festival after *Plätze in Städten* (*Places in Cities*, 1998). Even though *Marseille* only reached a very small

[234] Claudia Breger, "Language (Absence Thereof)," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 188.
[235] Dominik Graf in Abel, "Jigsaw Puzzle."
[236] Dominik Graf in Dominik Graf, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Christian Petzold, "Mailwechsel 'Berliner Schule,'" *Revolver* 16 (2007): 38.

cinema audience in Germany (approximately 3100 viewers), it was received with largely positive criticism, particularly in France, where the impact the film had on the critics contributed to an increasing interest in contemporary German cinema, and led to the label "Nouvelle Vague Allemande."[237]

Schanelec, born in 1962 in the Southern German town of Aalen, attended the DFFB, the Berlin Film and Television Academy, from 1990 to 1995, almost simultaneously with the other two directors of the so-called first generation of the Berlin School, Thomas Arslan and Christian Petzold. Before studying film directing, Schanelec was a stage actress at various renowned German theatres. Her decision to orientate herself towards cinema was motivated by a certain discomfort with theatre representation. What distinguishes film from theatre for Schanelec is not so much the content but rather the form.[238] Since graduation, she has directed six feature films which are characterised by a distinctive image composition that consciously renounces common cinematic techniques such as shot/reverse shot; in fact, there are no repetitive images in Schanelec's films, every shot only appears once. Schanelec's approach, moreover, features a predominant use of long takes and static shots. While some of her previous films only consist of static shots, the camera in *Marseille* does become more mobile; even so, static shots continue to prevail. For Ekkehard Knörer, Schanelec's films form a "school of seeing;" a school which, as Marco Abel has suggested, is not limited to the visual level but also includes the audible, hence a "school of hearing."[239]

In contrast to mainstream approaches, Schanelec aims to show ordinary people in ordinary situations. The following self-assessment by Belgian director Chantal Akerman may thus be considered transferrable to Schanelec: "If I have a reputation for being difficult, it's because I love the everyday and want to present it. In general people go to the movies precisely to escape the everyday."[240] As Schanelec has commented on her film *Mein langsames Leben*: "Ich hab' mich gefragt, was passiert, wenn man

[237] It is, in fact, not the first time that international film(maker)s were well received in France before being appreciated in their country of origin. One might think of the celebration of Italian Neorealism by French critics and new wave directors.
[238] Angela Schanelec in Geremia Carrara and Gisella Gaspari, *Der Ton, das Wort, das Bild: Das Kino der Angela Schanelec* (DVD extra of Mein langsames Leben, Filmgalerie 451, 2008).
[239] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 126.
[240] Quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, "The Integrity of Exile and the Everyday," *Lola* 2 (June 2012), http://www.lolajournal.com/2/integrity_exile.html.

versucht, sich an nichts als an die Normalität zu halten."[241] This claim for normality, however, should not be mistaken for an unreflected belief in the medium's transparency but goes hand in hand with stylisation. In fact, what predestines Schanelec's films, and especially *Marseille*, for discussions about cinematic realism(s) is the inherent conflict between their "quasi-documentary physical immediacy,"[242] on the one hand, and a pronounced awareness of form (visible, for instance, in her distinctive use of framing), on the other.

The contrast between what could be characterised, to use Kracauer's terms, as realistic and formative elements is, moreover, not the only tension in Schanelec's approach; her films also decidedly stretch the idea of narrative cinema. Ekkehard Knörer has pointed to the extent to which Schanelec's practice of openness questions the very basics of narrative cinema:

> Wenn erzählen heißt: Zusammenhänge herstellen und erklären, dann ist Angela Schanelec keine Erzählerin. Ihr geht es, im Gegenteil, um das Offenlassen. Ihre Filme produzieren kein Wissen, nicht über Figuren, Orte, Beziehungen. Sie zeigen, sie verweilen auf Figuren und an Orten, sie beobachten Menschen beim Sprechen und Schweigen, beim Arbeiten und Tanzen. Aber sie erklären uns nicht, was wir sehen.[243]

Schanelec's observational attitude, if we follow Knörer's accurate evaluation, fully resists the common strategies of narrative cinema.[244] The storytelling is highly elliptical and meandering, commonly focussing on the consequences of actions rather than the actions themselves. In the light of her almost complete avoidance of mainstream cinematic practice, the question arises of whether Schanelec can be considered an avant-garde filmmaker. If one wanted to position Berlin School cinema within the avant-garde, Schanelec would be the most obvious choice to demonstrate this, since among the directors discussed in this study she has taken the rejection of cinematic conventions the furthest. Marco Abel nevertheless hesitates to understand Schanelec's work, as well as that of her colleagues, as part of avant-garde cinema. In his view, "Berlin School

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[241] Angela Schanelec, "Die Regisseurin über ihren Film," *Mein langsames Leben press kit*, http://www.peripherfilm.de/meinlangsamesleben/mllheft.PDF.
[242] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 121.
[243] Ekkehard Knörer, "Reichtum der Reduktion," *die tageszeitung*, May 18, 2006.
[244] One could add here, though, as Sabine Nessel has suggested with reference to Thomas Arslan's *Ferien* (*Vacation*, 2007), that in cinema everything has narrative quality: "Licht, Kadrierung, Einstellungslänge, Off, Ton, Musik und Geräusche."[244] Sabine Nessel, "Ferien vom Erzählen: Leerstellen, Ellipsen und das Wissen vom Erzählen im neuen Autorenkino der Berliner Schule," in *Erzählen im Film: Unzuverlässigkeit—Audiovisualität—Musik*, ed. Susanne Kaul and Jean-Pierre Palmier (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), 116.

filmmakers belong to a film-historical lineage that seeks to problematize the narrative without negating it *in toto*."[245] By rejecting the idea of the Berlin School as cinematic avant-garde, Abel foregrounds the differences between films from the Berlin School and those of experimental filmmakers such as Michael Snow whose approach can be located completely outside of narrative cinema.

Concurring with Abel's general assessment, it might be useful in this context to adduce Giles Deleuze's notion of the time-image. In his two books on cinema, *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*, Deleuze examines the medium's breaking away from the predominance of the action-image (a type which, along the perception-image and the affection-image, belongs to the group of the movement-image) towards the formation of time-images. Whereas for Deleuze early and classical cinema is organised largely around "sensory-motor links" between (narrative) actions, modern or post-classical cinema can be defined precisely by the loosening of such links (a shift exemplified by Italian Neorealism). Instead of establishing connections, time-images, Deleuze suggests, are characterised by a relative autonomy from preceding and following shots, constituting "direct presentations of time,"[246] so-called pure optical and sound situations. Such time-images, moreover, as Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn have pointed out, "are connotative rather than denotative, imbuing objects with a number of associations."[247]

Chaudhuri and Finn have taken Deleuze's notion of the time-image, and its accompanying optical and sound situations, as a starting point for their examination of open images in New Iranian Cinema (with reference to Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave). By the term open image, they understand the employment of image and sound components that render the phenomena on screen indeterminate, a mode of representation which goes hand in hand with the reduction of signification and narrative closure. However, the application of open images should not be understood as a complete refusal of narration, as Chaudhuri and Finn explain. With reference to Pier Paolo Pasolini's juxtaposing of the overdetermined "cinema of prose," and the free imagery of the "cinema of poetry," they draw attention to the tensions arising from

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[245] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 111.

[246] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 41.

[247] Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn, "The Open Image: Poetic Realism and the New Iranian Cinema," *Screen* 44 (Spring 2003): 43.

approaches on the margins of narrative cinema, and the possibility that "a poetic image infuses a prosaic narrative with its ambiguity."[248]

This brings us back to the cinema of Angela Schanelec. The fact that her films are anything but plot-driven and avoid the conventions of narrative cinema may complicate plot summaries, but does not render the endeavour impossible. In *Marseille*, Sophie (Maren Eggert), a young photographer from Berlin, comes to Marseille after exchanging flats with Zelda, a woman from the eponymous city. Almost without giving any hints about the character—neither background information about her past life nor motivations for the move—during the first forty minutes, which take place in Marseille, the film captures how Sophie gets to know her new environment by showing moments or fragments of that encounter. We see observations of Sophie's exploration of the city, as she wanders through the streets and takes photographs. She then meets Pierre (Alexis Loret), a young auto mechanic, who lends her a car for a trip to the outskirts of the city (a trip we do not see), and with whom she spends some time. When Sophie seems to be settling in (and amorous feelings between her and Pierre arise), an abrupt transition vaults her back to Berlin. While the film has concentrated heavily on the protagonist up to this point, it almost abandons her for almost the next forty minutes; these take place in Berlin and bring into focus instead the life of Sophie's best friend Hanna (Marie-Lou Sellem), with her boyfriend Ivan (Devid Striesow) and son Anton. When Sophie decides to go to Marseille again, she is assaulted after arriving at the train station (an action we again do not see). What is shown instead is an interrogation involving Sophie at the police station. *Marseille* ends with four shots of the beach, on the last of which Sophie can be traced in the background: an open and ambiguous ending.

Framing the world

If we understand filmic images, in line with Kracauer, as visualisations of the material world, the question of how this world is rendered visible seems to be of special interest. So what is Schanelec's visual approach to physical reality in *Marseille*? Let us consider the opening scene. Following short and spare opening credits (white font on black background), we are located immediately within the 'action,' on both the visual and

[248] Ibid., 52.

audible level. Before giving attention to questions of sound, it is the visual that matters here. *Marseille* starts in a car, filmed from the back seat through the front window onto the streets of the city. Instead of an establishing shot of the environment, the frame of the first scene is rather narrow.[249] Zelda, the driver, is within the frame, whereas Sophie at first remains off-screen (Fig. 1). "Do you know your way round?" Zelda asks. "No."[250] Zelda then stops the car and gets out to buy a map at a newspaper kiosk along the street. The camera pans left, keeping Zelda in the frame. When she gets back in the car the camera pans back a little further, so for the first time we see Sophie, the protagonist of the film, sitting in the passenger seat (Fig. 2).

Our view of the women, however, is obstructed, since they are filmed in three-quarter profiles from behind. We therefore only see small parts of their faces, ears and necks, as well as Zelda's eyes, nose and forehead in the rear-view mirror. Moreover, the low-key illumination in the car contrasts with the relative brightness of the streets of Marseille beyond the front window. As a consequence, the spectator's eyes may be directed towards the urban environment outside of the car, where we catch sight of the city's street life. On the other hand, the relative obscurity in the car makes us curious about the characters, with the result that we look at them even harder to catch a glimpse of them. The immediacy of the material world is intensified by the lack of background information, which inevitably forces the spectator to observe the image, the human figures as well as the spatial surroundings, for any possible 'sign.' Thus, the ambiguous quality of the opening shot arises from both a concentration on physical reality and an interplay between showing and not showing.

[249] Johannes von Moltke has detected tight framings as quite common for beginnings of Berlin School films, "Beginnings," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 51–55.

[250] The dialogue is in French (English translation from the DVD subtitles).

FIGURE 1 / 2: APPROACHING MARSEILLE

What becomes evident in the opening shot, moreover, is the pronounced camerawork, and here particularly the well-defined framing. Indeed, the distinctive use of framing can be considered an essential characteristic of Schanelec's approach. Her highly principled cinematic practice is informed by the idea that the image is always just a segment of the recorded world, and hence an index of the the constructedness of the visual field. In Schanelec's films, moreover, the world outside of the frame is of similar importance to the details visible on screen as it possesses the potential to stimulate the spectator's imagination.

"In any image," David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have suggested, "the frame is not simply a neutral border; it imposes a certain vantage point onto the material within the image. In cinema, the frame is important because it actively *defines* the image

for us."[251] This brief introductory remark on framing points to questions we face in Schanelec's *Marseille*, which also relate to the medium's relation to reality. As early as 1932, in one of the first theoretical accounts of the filmic medium, Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art*, the author argued that

> Since our eyes can move freely in every direction, our field of vision is practically unlimited. A film image, on the other hand, is definitely bounded by its margins. Only what appears within these margins is visible, and therefore the film artist is forced—has the opportunity—to make a selection from the infinity of real life. In other words, he can choose his "motif."[252]

By pointing to its delimitation, Arnheim stresses the notion of the filmic image as a canvas consisting of "two vertical and two horizontal lines,"[253] a fact which, alongside other features such as colour and two-dimensionality, supports his key argument that film differs fundamentally from reality, since the image – unlike lived reality – is bound by the limits of a two-dimensional frame.

Unlike Arnhem, whose focus was on cinema's artificiality and its distinctiveness from the pre-existing world, Kracauer, though fully aware of the constructedness of the filmic image (and championing it as long as artistic decisions assisted in rendering visible the material world), highlighted the medium's documentary qualities. Yet, what connects Arnheim's and Kracauer's approaches is their common attention to a medium specificity that distinguishes film from other arts. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener have suggested, most early and classical film theories that gave priority to the visual over other components considered filmic image either as a frame of or a window onto the world. Whereas 'formalist' theories seemed to use the metaphor of the frame to foreground the artificiality of filmic images, 'realist' ones saw the screen as window, an idea that highlighted the directness of film's visual encounter with the pre-existing world.[254]

André Bazin, moreover, points to the differences in framing between filmic images and painting. In painting, he writes, "[t]he essential role of the frame is, if not to

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[251] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 182.
[252] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 75.
[253] Ibid., 74.
[254] Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 16–17. However, what Elsaesser and Hagener forget to mention is that Kracauer, in marked contrast to Arnheim, contextualises cinema precisely by dissociating it from the traditional arts, hence the characterisation as an "art with a difference" (see chapter 1).

create at least to emphasize the difference between the microcosm of the picture and macrocosm of the natural world in which the painting has come to take its place."[255] In contrast, "[t]he outer edges of the screen are not, as the technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely to the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal."[256]

In his first *Cinema* book, *The Movement-Image*, Gilles Deleuze refers to Bazin's distinction between framed images in cinema and painting. But unlike Bazin, who aimed to shed light on the differences between the two art forms and their relation to reality, Deleuze draws attention to two tendencies in uses of the film frame: its production of relatively open versus self-contained images. Defining framing as "the determination of a closed system, a relatively closed system which includes everything which is present in the image—sets, characters, props,"[257] Deleuze is particularly interested in the different functions and purposes of what he terms the outer field, which, as he suggests, refer back to the use of framing. Whereas the (relatively) open image (exemplified by Renoir's films) relates directly to matters outside of the frame that might become visible in the next shot, images that form part of a closed system (e.g. in Hitchcock's cinema) may turn into *mental* images, thus evoking the world as a whole.

In an essay on framing in Berlin School films, Brigitta Wagner detects four types of frames frequently used by Berlin School directors, including Angela Schanelec. Two of these are of particular significance with regard to *Marseille*: the "imprisoning" and the "antisocial" frame. Wagner defines the former as follows:

> The imprisoning frame rejects the spatial contiguity traced by a mobile camera. […] Though the diegetic world of the Berlin School also extends the boundaries of a given shot, access to offscreen space is often withheld. Instead, a character is placed, often alone, in the visual field with his or her body caged by the static edges of the frame and a rear wall. Limited to a fixed performance space, the body is subject to the camera's unwavering stare and to a temporal continuity unbroken by cuts and variations in shot scale.[258]

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[255] André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 165.
[256] Ibid., 166.
[257] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 12.
[258] Brigitta Wagner, "Framings," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 138.

The second type, the antisocial frame, is described in this way:

> [T]he architecture of the frame disciplines spectatorial expectations through a refusal to "cover" continuity cues such as eyeline matches, matches on action and shot/reverse shot patterns. By avoiding the clarity that these cues usually establish between two characters or between characters and setting, the filmmakers of the Berlin School introduce a frame that might be termed "antisocial." As if disinterested in mere action, the antisocial frame often selects reaction over action. This interrupts the process of making inferences about character behaviour and substitutes complexity and uncertainty for unequivocal information.[259]

What these uses of framing, here referred to as the imprisoning and antisocial frame, have in common is the camera's static character, and the ambiguity of what can be seen in the image, which, in turn, invites the audience to observe even more carefully the events on the screen. In *Marseille*, there are several scenes in which the framing can be considered imprisoning or antisocial, to use Wagner's terms. Take, for instance, the various shots of Sophie in which she is staged against a wall or a window: on the bus, in her bleak holiday apartment in Marseille, at the closed entrance door of the cinema, in her own flat in Berlin, on the train, or indeed during the interrogation scene at the police station. What all these shots have in common is the concentration on the protagonist within a static, relatively tight frame; we are invited to observe nothing very spectacular in terms of narrative action, but bits and fragments of physical existence. This also applies to scenes in which the protagonist is not alone but in company, such as at the beginning of the film with Zelda in the car (see above) or, in the subsequent shot, where Zelda shows Sophie her apartment.

In this more than three-minute-long shot, a static camera captures the scene—two women chatting, the handover of a set of keys, Zelda's farewell—through the open balcony door. This perspective is not unusual for Schanelec; her films regularly provide us with viewpoints through doors or windows, delimitations which divide the filmic space and thus duplicate the act of framing. In this particular shot, the image frame is further subdivided by a supporting column in the centre of the room. Yet, this does not mean unambiguously that the images form a closed system; they also point to the world outside of the frame. This results mainly from the always perceptible ambient sound. In fact, at the beginning of this shot, the balcony door is still closed, and when Zelda opens it, the glass reflects just for a second the surroundings opposite the apartment. Even

[259] Ibid., 139.

more significantly, the world immediately enters by means of street noises; manifestations of the medium's centrifugal forces.

Sonic materialism

Sound (recording) plays a central role in Schanelec's cinema and shapes its strong adherence to the material world, a fact that can be observed in exemplary manner in *Marseille*. Schanelec's films rely exclusively on diegetic sound. The director's non-manipulative attitude to sound correlates with a mode of representation we may call naturalist or indexical. In fact, for Schanelec sound recording appears to be a matter of faith, an almost ethical question of filmmaking in the tradition of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.[260] As Schanelec has explained her sound practice,

> Ich versuche den Ton so wenig wie möglich zu manipulieren. [...] Und der Ton ist auch die Möglichkeit für mich den Bezug zur Wirklichkeit zu halten. Also wenn ich zum Beispiel auf der Straße drehe und ich sage dem Tonmann "Ich brauche diesen O-Ton hier," wir müssen das so machen, dass wir die Dialoge wirklich benutzen können, weil ich möchte den O-Ton haben, und das soll kein Primärton sein und ich mache das danach nach. Dann liegt das daran, dass das was ich geschrieben habe und was ich inszeniere, dieser ganze Akt des künstlichen Herstellens, also dass das ganze Team und die Darsteller zu dem Zeitpunkt da sind und etwas Bestimmtes machen, was mit der Wirklichkeit gar nichts zu tun hat. Und in dem Moment aber, in dem ich das mit der Wirklichkeit zusammenbringe über den Ton, weil der Ton ist das, was in dem Moment wirklich da ist. Dann hilft es mir auch an das zu glauben, also daran zu glauben, dass das was ich mache, sein könnte, bestehen kann in dem Wirklichen.[261]

As we can see, for Schanelec the technique of direct sound recording is deeply connected with questions of reality, and is hence a fundamental part of realist filmmaking. What she suggests here is that original sound, much more than images, can be seen as a direct link to the physical world. Whereas the visual lacks faithfulness because of its staged elements, direct sound, Schanelec seems to argue, functions as a trace of the real, an argument somewhat similar to the indexical relationship between the pro-filmic event and its photo-chemical 'fingerprint' on celluloid as claimed in realist film theories. For Schanelec, the film's ambient sound carries physical evidence of a specific place and event in time (in the presence of the sound recording device), sonic

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[260] See Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, "Direct Sound: An Interview with Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 150–53.

[261] Angela Schanelec in Carrara and Gaspari, *Das Kino der Angela Schanelec*.

material that Schanelec intends to leave as 'raw' as possible, rather than fabricating sounds in post-production.

Leaving aside for a moment matters of indexicality, let us turn to the notion of physical reality to which Schanelec's sound practice is related. Ambient sounds, whose volume is dampened in most more conventional films, are always distinctly noticeable. From the very first sequence, *Marseille* provides us with soundscapes of the city, predominantly street noises that we are not used to hearing (at least not to this degree) in cinema. Thus, when Sophie explores the city, the sound of the environment continuously reaches our ears. The sounds we hear are by no means spectacular but mostly casual noises such as the car traffic accompanying the protagonist's wanderings (plus her footsteps on the pavement) or the murmur of people's conversations. In the opening shot, for instance, the sounds from inside the car (e.g. when Zelda uses the gears or the hand brake) as well as the street noises are clearly audible. Here, as repeatedly throughout the film, the sound sources are not (immediately) visible. As Marco Abel has aptly observed, Schanelec's films aim to avoid "the redundancy of sound and image typical of narrative cinema."[262] Instead of duplicating the visual and the auditory level, Schanelec forces us to pay attention to the image *and* the sound, as both seem to be of equal importance. This results from the director's distinctive choice of framing, which produces an interplay between on and off-screen space that is further accentuated by the use of offscreen sound.

In a scene early in the film, a panning camera frames Sophie as she walks down the stairs, passes a mechanic working on a car, and then enters a fruit & vegetable store. Here, the camera comes to rest, providing us with a view of the store entrance, filmed from a point very close behind the mechanic (Pierre whom Sophie will get to know soon) who continues his work. On the auditory level, the intense noise from the mechanic's work, audible even before the sound source becomes visible, is the centre of attention. Or, take another scene from the beginning of the film, when Sophie, captured in close-up, rides on a bus. When the bus stops, we hear the sound of opening doors as well as the fact that the engine is turned off. Then, the sound of leafing through a newspaper and shouts by children become distinctively audible, though not yet visible, as at first only Sophie remains in shot. It is only when the film cuts to the next shot—a view

[262] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 127.

through the windscreen of the bus—that we can see the sound sources: the newspaper in the driver's hands as well as children playing in the background. The sound in this scene does not entail 'information' already visible on the screen. Rather, it becomes an equally important part of the film experience, an almost autonomous force, yet without a clear narrative function. Thus, the sonic materiality of phenomena is emphasised, their "materializing sound indices," as defined by Michel Chion:

> A sound of voices, noise or music has a particular number of *materializing sound indices*, from zero to infinity, whose relative abundance or scarcity always influences the perception of the scene and its meaning. Materializing indices can pull the scene toward the material and concrete, or their sparsity can lead to a perception of the characters and story as ethereal, abstract and fluid. The materializing indices are the sound's details that cause us to "feel" the material conditions of the sound source, and refer to the concrete process of the sound's production.[263]

For Dominik Graf, Schanelec's film "affords the audience the opportunity to hear a foreign city like one hears it in real life. You walk with this character through the city, you hear more than you see, and you 'are' with the actress together in Marseille. It's not like you hear something *new* but, rather, you simply *hear*, like you hear in real life."[264] Graf hints here at the achievements of Schanelec's approach to sonic reality, a mode we are inclined to call documentary. Yet, the case appears to be more complicated. Rick Altman has pointed to differences between the actual sound event and its recording:

> For what the record contains is not the sound event as such but a record of a particular hearing, a specific version of the story of the sound event. Every recording is thus signed, as it were, with the mark of the particular circumstances in which it was heard. […] Every recording carries the elements of this *spatial signature*, carried in the audible signs of each hearing's particularities.[265]

Altman suggests that artistic and technological choices are immensely significant for the sound recording. He refers here particularly to the location of the microphone—the point of addition—but also the actual recording device. Both factors, he argues, influence enormously—or one could say, manipulate—the way sound is recorded and eventually perceived. As we can see, the question of what (sonic) 'reality' is recorded and revealed, of what reaches the audience's ears, depends on artistic and technological

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[263] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 114.
[264] Dominik Graf in Abel, "Jigsaw Puzzle" (emphasis in original).
[265] Rick Altman, "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound," in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24.

choices; as well as the location of perception, the actual (sound) equipment of the cinema (or alternative places/devices of viewing). This shows us again, in a way analogous to the visual level, that cinematic realism should not be equated with an immediate window onto reality; rather, as in the case of the Berlin School, it is the result of "a conscious rendering and modification of theoretically and film historically derived methods."[266]

Yet, the soundscapes of *Marseille*—however 'subjective' they might be—function as a document, a *spatial signature* of the pro-filmic event, which is a direct result of Schanelec's sound practice. By means of direct sound recording, (the controlled art of) filmmaking, particularly in cities, opens itself up to contingencies, as Schanelec has suggested,

> Alle meine Filme spielen in der Stadt, und diese Stadt drückt sich auch dadurch aus, daß sie laut ist, und sie ist immer laut. Auf dem Land oder in der Kleinstadt ist der Ton ein völlig anderer. Wenn ich bei einer Szene in der Friedrichstraße nicht den O-Ton hätte, dann könnte man natürlich Straßengeräusche dazumischen, aber es gibt Geräusche, auf die kommt man nicht. Oder man kann sie nicht so dazumischen, wie sie in Wirklichkeit passieren. Das merke ich gerade bei lauten Szenen immer wieder. Es gibt die Huper eines Autos oder entfernt eine Feuerwehr. Natürlich kann man alles nachmachen, aber es hat eine andere Wirklichkeit, wenn man es in dem Moment macht. Auch für Schauspieler ist es was völlig anderes. […] Es ist einfacher für die Schauspieler, wenn die Situation auch in der Realität besteht. Diese Realität bleibt spürbar als außerhalb des Bildes.[267]

As a consequence of their adherence to direct sound, Schanelec's films create a sensory encounter with the environment of the film actions, provoking a sense of presence and place, the impression of *being there*. By rendering audible casual phenomena without a clear narrative function, moreover, the auditory level contributes to the ambiguous and open character of physical reality.

Filming the light

We now come back to the visual level for the discussion of a further significant feature of Schanelec's approach. Similar to the principle of direct sound recording, natural lighting is central for the director's mode of cinematic representation, which allows only natural sources of illumination or, at the most, very slight modifications of the light

[266] Baute et al., "Collage."
[267] Angela Schanelec in Antonia Ganz, "Interview: Angela Schanelec," *Revolver* 5 (2001): 98–105.

found at the places where the films are shot. As Reinhold Vorschneider, the regular cameraman in Schanelec's films, explains,

> Ein ganz großes Thema am Anfang unserer Zusammenarbeit war es auch, nach Möglichkeit mit natürlichem Licht zu arbeiten oder zumindest den Eindruck herzustellen, dass es sich um natürliches Licht handelt, bzw. dass man das natürliche Licht, was vorfindlich ist, nicht zu sehr modifiziert. Bei Angela war das am Anfang schon fast obsessiv. Klassische filmische Mittel wie die Aufhellung waren tabu […].[268]

Schanelec's 'obsession' with natural light distinguishes her use of lighting from its predominant deployment in cinema. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have suggested that "much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting."[269] According to Bordwell and Thompson, one can distinguish between "four major features of film lighting: its quality, direction, source, and color."[270] In classical narrative cinema, the illumination of a scene arises from three different sources: key light, fill light and back light—so-called three-point-lighting—which can be combined with different directions (from above, below or the sides) and qualities (high or key light) in order to emphasise or deemphasise characters or dramaturgical effects. Moreover, most light in fiction films stems from artificial sources, though it is often used in correspondence with the alleged visible sources within the diegesis (lamps, candles etc).

However, there are alternate cinematic approaches, including Schanelec's, which rely almost exclusively on natural light. In general, the foregoing of artificial lighting in fiction films is related to realist approaches, and in particular to documentary filmmaking, where its use is either not feasible (because of the circumstances) or desirable (for ethical reasons). In narrative cinema, this tradition can be traced back to the Italian neorealist films of the 1940s and their hybrid mixture of documentary elements with fictional stories, expressed by the use of non-professional actors and location shooting as well as, indeed, natural light. The preference for natural light is also reflected in one of the latest postulations of realist filmmaking, the manifesto of the Danish Dogma 95 movement, one of whose rules stipulates that "[s]pecial lighting is not

[268] Reinhold Vorschneider in Christoph Hochhäusler and Nicolas Wackerbarth, "Interview: Angela Schanelec, Reinhold Vorschneider," *Revolver* 13 (2005): 19.
[269] Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 124.
[270] Ibid., 126.

acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera)."[271]

Schanelec's—and tendentially also her Berlin School peers'—non-manipulative attitude towards lighting seems to be less a matter of authenticity than part of a mode of cinematic representation intended to support the viewer in re-seeing the world: a phenomenological encounter with the surface of things, which can also mean that the characters are in shade or otherwise obstructed. Darkness in *Marseille* thus has nothing to do with characterisation or dramaturgical effects. Unlike in classical cinema, in which lighting is motivated quite literally by the way it sheds light on the character(s)—a use that remains predominant in mainstream cinema, as Bordwell and Thompson further explain—, Schanelec, as Vorschneider has pointed out, refuses (as does Vorschneider himself) the dominant rules of illumination that are part of conventions and functions of cinematic storytelling: "Wenn man das so sagen will, mache ich ja nie Personenlicht, sondern immer Raumlicht. Ich nehme also eine bestimmte Lichtsituation des Raumes an." [272]

Vorschneider suggests here that his (and Schanelec's) starting point for lightning is not the character or the story, but the space, or even more specifically, the (position of) light within that space, preferably daylight. As he further explains, "Mein Ausgangspunkt ist nicht in erster Linie die Dramaturgie der Erzählung, ist nicht nur das Herrzustellende, sondern auch die Wertschätzung des Vorgefundenen. Das gilt vor allem für das Licht. Vielleicht ist das jetzt überspitzt formuliert. Es geht dabei auch um eine bestimmte Art des Zeigens."[273] Schanelec, in turn, has stated that her motivation for asking Vorschneider to become her cinematographer was related to his peculiar handling of light. In her laudatory speech on the occasion of the Marburg Camera Award celebration, Schanelec praises Vorschneider precisely for "filming the light itself."[274]

This treatment of light is not limited to Vorschneider/Schanelec, as Merten Worthmann's observation of light in the films of Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec, quoted in the previous chapter, suggests: "In den Bildern scheint, trotz unterschiedlicher Kameraleute, das gleiche Licht zu herrschen—eine Art nüchternes, doch intensives

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[271] See for the Dogma 95 rules, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, "The Vow of Chastity," March 13, 1995, http://www.dogme95.dk/the-vow-of-chastity/.
[272] Reinhold Vorschneider in Rainer Gansera, "Mich interressiert das Tageslicht," *epd Film* 6 (2013): 26.
[273] Reinhold Vorschneider in ibid., 27.
[274] Angela Schanelec, "Das Licht selbst filmen," *die tageszeitung*, March 14, 2013, http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/digitaz/artikel/?ressort=ku&dig=2013/03/1.

Leuchten."[275] This 'sober but intense glow' gives rise, moreover,—at least in Schanelec's vision—to beauty, a significant aspect in the director's approach to reality: "Es geht mir darum, die Schönheit zu sehen—in den Dingen oder in den Menschen," [276] says Schanelec.

FIGURE 3 / 4: AGAINST THE CONVENTIONS OF LIGHTING

As we can see, the director's personal notion of beauty refers to the mundane and quotidian object world—both human and non-human—, a modernist attitude that

[275] Worthmann, "Mit Vorsicht genießen."

[276] Angela Schanelec in Regina Kräh and Marc Ottiker, "'Es geht mir darum, die Schönheit zu sehen—in den Dingen oder in den Menschen': Filmemacherin Angela Schanelec im cinetramp-Gespräch," *cinetramp.de*, December 17, 2004, http://www.cinetramp.de/conpresso/dialog/detail.php?nr=501&kategor.

distinguishes itself from more traditional (philosophical) accounts of beauty. So does this mean that Schanelec is actually more interested in creating beauty than in penetrating the external world? No: they go hand in hand; the beauty produced by Schanelec's cinema, as Michael Baute et al. have suggested, results from a faithful representation of the world and a clinging to the material components of the pro-filmic event. This understanding shares similarities with Kracauer's reflections on the relation of beauty and the photographic medium. Unlike in the traditional arts, Kracauer argues, the beauty of photographs is rather a by-product, which "is inseparable from their being sensitive and technically impeccable readings rather than autonomous creations."[277]

> [P]hotographs stand a chance of being beautiful to the extent that they comply with the photographic approach. This would account for the frequent observation that pictures extending or vision are not only gratifying as camera revelations but appeal to us aesthetically also—no matter, for the rest, whether they result from high selectivity or amount to purely mechanical products like the aerial reconnaissance photographs.[278]

Schanelec's non-manipulative attitude towards lighting—her proscription of artificial sources—is also reflected within *Marseille* by the protagonist's use of the still photo camera. As mentioned above, Sophie is a photographer who explores the French city with her camera. She is an observer of the city, indeed of life in general, and the camera is her instrument. Sophie's approach to her new environment, her use of the camera, is in many ways similar to the use of the film camera in *Marseille*. At the end of the first part of Marseille, Sophie is with Pierre and some friends of his in an Arab music bar. They dance and chat, and later on someone of the group says he would like to see her camera. "Where is the flash?" he asks, to which she responds that the camera has no flash. Taking pictures without flash clearly coincides with the low illumination in the film, the forgoing of artificial lighting by Schanelec and Vorschneider.[279]

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[277] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 21.

[278] Ibid., 21–22.

[279] A further aspect of the protagonist's photo camera reflects the technology and the techniques used in *Marseille*: Sophie's use of an analogue camera relates to the celluloid (35mm film). In *Marseille*, photography is a palpable theme in various sequences. Not only do we see Sophie while taking pictures, but also when she waits for the developed film, pins pictures on the wall or studies enlarged copies. These analogies between the director's conception of the filmic medium and the protagonist's use of the photo camera (taking pictures as a way of getting a sense of the physical world) are no coincidence, but a conscious reflection on the production of (mediated) images and how we perceive them. They address the question of how to re-present and experience reality within a photographic medium. In fact, photography plays an important role not only in *Marseille* but in several of Schanelec's films. In *Orly* (2010), the director's sixth feature film, which was shot almost entirely at the airport of Paris-Orly,

Schanelec's naturalistic use of lighting and sound illustrates the director's preoccupation with filmic representations in relation to reality. In debates on realism, these questions are traditionally associated with notions of iconography (a certain resemblance between film and reality) or indexicality (a direct physical relationship between film and the pro-filmic event). One could say that Schanelec's cinematic approach intends by contrast to achieve not one of these qualities, but several things simultaneously: her films are at one and the same time a trope of the real, predominantly (but not only) established via sound (an observation that I shall further discuss later on in this chapter); an iconic or 'fair' representation of the world (which becomes apparent, for instance, in the films' approach to lighting); and, at the same time, a cinematic form that renders that same world strange.

Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*: Multi-layered Realities

We turn now to a second film, Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, in which one can observe a similar sensitivity to the materiality of the everyday. Arslan's cinema brings into play the physical world on the visual and auditory level and, in so doing, creates a cinematic encounter with reality that, at the same time, is attentive to its own mediation and constructedness. Like Angela Schanelec, Thomas Arslan was among the directors initially associated with the Berlin School when the term was coined by Worthmann and Gansera in the early 2000s. Arslan was born in 1962 in Braunschweig (Lower Saxony) as the son of a German mother and a Turkish father, and grew up in the Ruhr town of Essen, with a four-year elementary-school stint in Turkey in between. After completing his civilian service as a replacement for military service in Hamburg and studying German literature for a short period in Munich, Arslan eventually settled in Berlin, where he attended the DFFB from 1986 to 1992.

Schanelec and Vorschneider, for the first time chose a digital camera, a decision which is also reflected by a couple in the film who use a digital photo camera. At one point, we see them reviewing pictures (supposedly taken during their holidays), which are stored on the camera's memory card, thus confronting us with a now common way of examining photographic images on the camera's display. In this way, *Orly*—as *Marseille*—reflects and reveals both the technology and the techniques of photography (which refers back to the own filmmaking process). Yet, in Schanelec's *Orly* (and the same holds true for the few other Berlin School films that have been shot digitally—Hochhäusler's *Falscher Bekenner* and Arslan's *Im Schatten*), digital camera equipment does not signify a break with analogue technology and techniques, as suggested by various theorists (see chapter 1), but is still used in the tradition of film as a photographic medium.

Two years after graduation, Arslan directed his first feature length film, *Mach die Musik leiser* (*Turn the Music Down*, 1994), a portrayal of a group of adolescents (played by lay actors) in Essen, the director's hometown. Even though this coming-of-age film already features Arslan's signature themes (the question of how one faces changes in life) and methods (what might be called observational cinema), it was his subsequent features that brought him more attention. Similarly to his debut, Arslan's second film, *Geschwister–Kardeşler* (*Brothers and Sisters*, 1997), concentrates on young people, three siblings in Berlin, who are, again, all played by non-professional actors. What distinguishes *Geschwister–Kardeşler* from its predecessor, however, is the fact that—akin to the director's personal background—the young protagonists Erol (Tamer Yigit), Ahmed (Savaş Yurderi) und Leyla (Serpil Turhan) live in a Turkish-German household (the film's title means siblings in German and Turkish).

Geschwister–Kardeşler is the first part of the director's so-called Berlin trilogy, a series that explores the lives of Turkish-German youth. It is followed by *Dealer* (1999), which centres upon Can (Tamer Yigit) and his failed attempts to get away from a career as drug dealer, and *Der schöne Tag*, the depiction of one day in the life of Deniz Turhan (Serpil Turhan). What the three parts of this trilogy have in common is, apart from taking place in the German capital, that they feature the second generation of Turkish immigrants. This immediately located Arslan within the emergent new wave of Turkish-German filmmakers, of whom Fatih Akin is arguably the most renowned, especially since his forth feature *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*, 2004) rather unexpectedly won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2004.[280]

Yet, in stark contrast to Akin's emotionally charged melodramas, Arslan's Berlin trilogy approaches Turkish-Germanness in a casual rather than obvious manner, concentrating on quite ordinary facets of the protagonists' everyday lives, such as the way they move, look, talk or interact. As a result, many of the issues the characters face do not seem to differ much from those of other young Berliners with no immigrant background of the same age. In an interview for the release of *Geschwister–Kardeşler*, Arslan remarked that he aimed to show how naturally young Turkish-German people move within their environment. It is precisely this naturalness of the characters'

[280] Also, Akin's next films won prizes at important festivals. For *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007), Akin received the Palm for the best script at the Cannes Film Festival, and for his follow-up, *Soul Kitchen* (2009), he obtained the Prize of the Jury at the Venice Film Festival.

everyday actions and conversations that his films tend to capture. Very different from identity politics, the director's political commitment lies instead in the films' radically aesthetic stance.[281] Arslan deliberately refuses to produce "milieu films," and thus delimits his approach from habitual depictions of immigrants of Turkish descent in German cinema and television:

> Kommen Personen türkischer Herkunft in deutschen Film vor, so sind sie entweder exotisches Beiwerk, werden für übergeordnete Diskurse instrumentalisiert oder zu eindimensionalen Opfern stilisiert. […] Mir ging es in erster Linie darum einen Rahmen zu schaffen, die den Personen eine Präsenz gibt, Menschen zu zeigen mit sehr alltäglichen Problemen und Widersprüchen, ohne über sie zu urteilen.[282]

To put this another way: instead of giving sociological facts, Arslan provides his characters with a *physical* presence that results from both their restrained performance mode (which will be analysed in more detail in the following chapter) and a cinematography (by Michael Wiesweg, the cameraman of the Berlin trilogy) that patiently observes characters and their environment, and which leaves room for the inspection of bodies and spaces, a method that has continued to prevail in Arslan's cinema regardless of the film's particular subject or location.

Since the Berlin trilogy, Arslan has made four more films to date, all of which leave the Turkish-German background of Berlin's districts of Kreuzberg and Schöneberg and turn to other milieus and settings: an almost voice-over-free documentary, *Aus der Ferne* (2006), which follows the director on a journey through Turkey, as well as three features: *Ferien* (*Vacation*, 2007), a multi-generation family drama set in the rural environment of Northeast Germany; *Im Schatten* (*In the Shadows*, 2010), a minimalist crime film reduced to the frame of the genre, which is less interested in the crime story than in the criminal's mundane practice; and *Gold* (2013), a western that shows the journey of a group of German emigrants travelling through Canada at the end of the 19th century in search of gold.

Despite the fact that Arslan's films have been concerned with various themes and locations, the director's work has habitually been discussed in the context of

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[281] Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics," in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, by Jacques Rancière, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 7–14.
[282] Thomas Arslan in "Interview mit Thomas Arslan," *Geschwister press kit*.

Turkish-German cinema.[283] In recent scholarship on this subject matter, Deniz Göktürk's observation of a successive shift from the "cinema of duty" to the "pleasures of hybridity" has gained acceptance.[284] Arslan has been considered among a new generation of filmmakers who, according to Randall Halle, "produce fresh and gritty Turkish-German metropolitan films"[285] that break with clichéd images of Turks in Germany as mostly female victims and male oppressors or criminals. Thus, the dominant question for film scholars who focus almost exclusively on the director's Berlin trilogy, appears to be whether Arslan's films differ from other approaches in Turkish-German cinema in past and present.

Without denying the valuable insights of these authors into Arslan's work in the context of Turkish-German cinema, there is a danger in reducing filmmakers and films depicting the lives of ethnic minorities, which have been regarded as part of an "accented cinema"[286] or a "cinema of double occupancy,"[287] to questions of ethnicity and (trans)cultural identity. Marco Abel, in contrast to the majority of film scholars, takes a different stand on Arslan, arguing that his cinema should be understood as "radically materialist,"[288] an observation that, I would like to suggest, also applies to the work of the other directors discussed in this study. Arslan's cinematic approach is not primarily preoccupied with identitarian questions—such as 'Am I German, Turkish, or German-Turkish?'—but rather, as Abel further suggests (drawing on Deleuze's reading of Spinoza), with (the possibility of) change in general; thus "the materialist question, 'What is this body *capable of doing*?'"[289] is of fundamental significance. In other words, it is not ethnic or cultural identity that matters most in Arslan's cinema, including his Berlin trilogy, but *physical* existence. As critic Katja Nicodemus has observed with regard to Arslan's *Geschwister*: "On their forays through Berlin-Kreuzberg, the brothers talk

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[283] Deniz Göktürk, "Turkish Women on German Streets: Closure and Exposure in Transnational Cinema," in *Spaces in European Cinema*, ed. Myrto Konstantarakos (Exeter: Intellect, 2000); Jessica Gallagher, "The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's Berlin Trilogy," *Seminar* 42, no. 3 (2006): 337–52; Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[284] Deniz Göktürk, "Beyond Paternalism: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema," in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 248–56.

[285] Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 146.

[286] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[287] Thomas Elsaesser, "Double Occupancy and Small Adjustments: Space, Place and Policy in the New European Cinema of the 1990s," in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, by Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 108–30.

[288] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 65.

[289] Ibid.

about everything: love and money problems, family and future worries, the coolest names for pit bulls. Their walks through the neighbourhood become the expression of a drifting approach that can no longer be identified as German, Turkish or German-Turkish." [290] Indeed, movement is a crucial element of Arslan's "kinetic cinema" (Nicodemus), as we will see in the following examination of *Der schöne Tag*, in which the aspect of Turkish-Germanness will be of importance only insofar it touches the director's material and self-reflective approach to physical reality.

Exploratory movements

Following the opening credits, which are of similarly sparse nature to those in *Marseille* but accompanied by an extra-diegetic electronic music track, Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* begins with an open image: a blue sky with a few fleecy clouds. This may invoke a notion of beauty, as referred to in the film title, yet at the same time street noise enters the film, which slightly counters the visual impression of the opening shot. The environmental sound continues as the film cuts to the interior of a flat, providing us with static shots of an open window, a young man sleeping in the bed, as well as a young woman in profile, in a close-up taken from behind. Deniz, the young woman, stands in the apartment, apparently watching the young man, her boyfriend (as we will get to know soon), who is outside of the frame. The apartment is barely illuminated, as a result of the foregoing of artificial lighting; the close-up of the young woman bears a certain resemblance to a silhouette. She then turns around nearly 180º degrees, while the camera remains static, so that we see her in profile again, before she leaves the flat.

Whereas the trilogy's first two features mainly concentrate on male protagonists—Can in *Dealer*, as well as two of the three siblings in *Geschwister*—, *Der schöne Tag* depicts around 24 hours—a beautiful day (as the film title suggests)—in the life of Deniz (Serpil Turhan), a young Turkish-German woman. During the 70-minute film, the camera follows Deniz through the city of Berlin and observes her doing quite casual things: getting up at her boyfriend's flat, drinking coffee at hers, working as a dubbing voice, having an argument with her boyfriend, going to a lake (where she breaks up with him), visiting her mother, auditioning for the principal role in a film, flirting and chatting

[290] Katja Nicodemus, "On the Move: Thomas Arslan's Kinetic Cinema," in *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, ed. Rajendra Roy and Anke Leweke (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 78.

with Diego (a neighbour she has just met), having dinner with her sister, seeing Diego again and talking till late, sleeping, having a conversation with a university professor, and working again.

The reason for this seemingly indifferent listing of Deniz's rather ordinary actions is, of course, not to confirm the criticism of Berlin School cinema as boring. Rather, I want to draw attention, first, to the sheer number of events occurring within one day of the protagonist's life. As a consequence of this condensation, Ekkehard Knörer argues in his review of *Der schöne Tag*, everydayness is not simply documented but also rendered strange.[291] This intensification of the everyday, I suggest, manifests itself in the protagonist's 'exploratory movements,' both literally and figuratively.

The literal element of these exploratory movements consists in the protagonist's *physical* motions. Deniz is constantly on the move, either walking or commuting on one of the city's public transport vehicles such as the metro, tram or train, and on one occasion, a taxi. During the entire film, the protagonist is depicted moving from one place of action to another. One must therefore agree with Knörer's observation that *Der schöne Tag* is founded on "the principle of movement."[292] The camera follows Deniz on her walks and rides through Berlin and gently accentuates her movements, not by moving itself—the camera mostly remains fixed—but by panning or tilting slightly side-, up- or downwards, or, on several occasions, observing Deniz walking towards the camera, and panning only when she passes by keeping Deniz framed from behind while she carries on, as if we were the camera eye (and turning our head and looking at her).

On the most banal level, Deniz's changes of location result from the necessity of moving from A to B. However, this does not explain the filmic motivation for the sheer number of scenes depicting the protagonist's motions. According to film scholar Thomas Schick, Deniz's *outer* movements replace the absent plot actions and evoke *inner* movements in the spectator: a perspective that recalls Douglas Sirk's famous remark: "Motion is emotion, in a way it can never be in the theatre."[293] Movement is also what distinguishes cinema from photography, Kracauer would probably add here: one of cinema's resources in its drive to record the flow of life, a quality that is further emphasised when movement is juxtaposed with motionlessness. *Der schöne Tag*

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[291] Ekkehard Knörer, "Der schöne Tag," *Jump Cut Magazin*, http://www.jump-cut.de/filmkritik-derschoenetag.html.
[292] Knörer, "Der schöne Tag".
[293] Douglas Sirk in Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk: Conversations with Jon Halliday* (London: Faber, 1997), 43.

constantly alternates between motion and stillness. When Deniz comes to rest while having a conversation or commuting, the camera, too, becomes mainly static. This oscillation between two modes of cinematographic practice, both of which can be termed observational, evokes a flow one might call 'intervallic.' By capturing the protagonist both in motion and stationary, Arslan's film creates a particular experience of the material world. With regard to Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, we could therefore say that Arslan's cinema, similarly to Schanelec's, is not simply aimed at recording but, even more, revealing the material world.

Moreover, the figurative aspect of the protagonist's exploratory movements lies in her search for answers to questions about love and relationships, her feelings and happiness, issues which Deniz discusses in one way or another throughout the film. "Du bist ständig auf der Suche. Versuch' doch mal zur Ruhe zu kommen," her sister Leyla comments at one point. At the beginning of the film, after having an argument with Jan, her boyfriend, about feelings of attraction to others aside from one's partner, they take the train to the Schlachtensee, a lake in the southwestern outskirts of the city, which has apparently been a sentimental place for the couple, and where Deniz now breaks up with Jan: "Weil ich dich nicht mehr liebe," she tells him. Her lack of love seems to result from a general discontent with Jan and his attitude; somehow Deniz expects more from him, from an amorous relationship, from life; expectations that will continue to preoccupy Deniz throughout the film. Shortly afterwards, when visiting her mother, she speaks about Deniz's deceased father, which leads to a discussion about love and relationships. Whereas her mother stresses the importance of commitment and responsibility, Deniz's idea of love is mostly based on feelings. Different perspectives on the film's subject matter are also addressed in Deniz's conversations with Diego, the young man she meets on her way through the city, and with her sister Leyla, who tells Deniz of her pregnancy and that she does not yet know whether she wants to keep the baby.

Whereas all these conversations are characteristically ordinary, Deniz's final encounter is of a slightly different nature. At a coffee bar, she bumps into a stranger (Elke Schmitter), a university professor working on the (everyday) history of love. In their brief conversation, the professor briefly summarises the scholarship in this field for Deniz, as well as for us—the spectators. In particular, she emphasises the impact of socio-economic changes on amorous relationships and the conception of (romantic)

love over the course of the last centuries. As she suggests, we are now increasingly faced with the possibility of choosing our relationships more freely, a development that goes hand in hand with the separation of private and professional relationships.

As Arslan has revealed, the statements by the professor originate from a radio interview with the sociologist Niklas Luhmann. For critic Ekkehard Knörer, this scene, criticised in numerous reviews for being overly figurative**,** is the clearest signal of the film's semi-essayistic approach.[294] *Der schöne Tag* goes beyond being a mere document of the everyday; instead, it becomes a reflection on the nature of love and the difficulties for romantic relationships arising from prevailing socio-economic conditions. In this way, Arslan's film may meet Christoph Hochhäusler's desire for "ein Kino, in dessen Zentrum Fragen, Bedüfnis, Probleme, Energien des Lebens stehen. […] Ein Kino, das diskursiv ist […] und sein will."[295] Yet, there remains a certain tension between the emphasis on material existence in the nearly dialogue-free observations of Deniz travelling through the city, on the one hand, and the discursive elements that come to the fore in the protagonist's conversations, on the other.[296]

For similar motives, Arslan brings into play in *Der schöne Tag* two French films: Eric Rohmer's *Conte d'éte* (*A Summer's Tale*, 1996) and *À nos amours* (*To Our Loves*, 1983) by Maurice Pialat, both of which address the complications of amorous relationships. Rohmer's film, which shows the male protagonist's struggles to choose between different women, quasi frames *Der schöne Tag*; at the beginning and, again, at the end of the film, we see Deniz in a dubbing studio, where she voices one of the women of *Conte d'éte*: a reference that is not only an *homage* to Rohmer but also, and more importantly, serves as a comment on Deniz's own issues with love and relationships (and leads to her decision to break up with her boyfriend). Similarly, Pialat's film offers a further perspective on that subject matter of *Der schöne Tag*. Moreover, the sequence in which *À nos amours* comes into play reveals the mediation

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[294] Knörer, "Der schöne Tag." This sequence may also be seen as a reference to Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962), where near the end of the film the female protagonist has a casual conversation with a philosopher.

[295] Christoph Hochhäusler, "Right to Reply: A Cinema of Challenge," *Vertigo* 3, no. 5 (Spring 2007), https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-5-spring-2007/a-cinema-of-challenge/.

[296] A further part of the conversation between Deniz and the professor may also be read as a comment on the film's contrast between physical and verbal expressions. Discussing the difficulties of expressing emotions in appropriate ways, Deniz suggests, "Es gibt die Gesten, die Blicke, die haben doch etwas Wahres." At which the professor replies, "Das ist vielleicht das Unmittelbarste, was wir haben. Aber wir würden nicht authentischer leben, wenn wir auf die Sprache verzichten würden."

and constructedness of reality, which is achieved—only seemingly paradoxically—by clinging to the materiality of the pro-filmic event. This scene seems central to me, not only for the film but for Arslan's self-reflective materialism in general, and will therefore be analysed in more detail.

Mediation rendered sensible

Approximately thirty minutes into the film, following Deniz's conversation with her mother, a sequence takes place at a film production company where she auditions for a leading role. From her mother's flat, Deniz takes a taxi to the production company. At this point, we see a mediated image of Deniz, a point of view shot through the rear-view mirror, corresponding to the gaze of the male taxi driver. When Deniz arrives at the production company, she is asked to wait for the audition. In the waiting area, another woman sits on an armchair and reads a magazine. Both women say hello and exchange brief looks, while Deniz seats herself on the sofa. She looks around and again at the other woman, just as she looks at people during the entire film, before picking up a magazine herself. Moments later, she is asked by the producer to come in.

When she enters the audition room the film cuts to the director (Hanns Zischler) who sits down on a chair. At his side, there is a monitor on which Deniz immediately appears (Fig. 5). We are faced here with different points of view: whereas the image we see of her is that on the monitor, the director hardly looks at her image there. Instead, his gaze is directed towards her body in the audition room, which at first remains off-screen. As a consequence, there is no eyeline match between the director and Deniz within the frame. Moreover, by providing us with the protagonist's image on the monitor, the film draws attention to the mediation of the image, and therefore its lack of transparency, its opacity. When she is asked by the director to introduce herself and talk, for instance, about something that occurred to her recently or a film that has made an impression on her, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Deniz, sitting in front of a sky-blue background (Fig. 6). The framing here differs from her image on the monitor in the previous shot; the camera keeps its distance, so that we do not yet get close to her. She remains in shot for eight seconds while she thinks about an answer.

The camera then cuts away to the other people in the room, looking at Deniz: the director, the producer and the cameraman (Fig. 7). This shot again provides us with the idea of different, partially mediated, points of view of the protagonist. Whereas the

cinematographer on the set observes Deniz through the camera (which produces the image on the monitor), producer and director alternately look at her directly or at the monitor. Then the film cuts back to her (Fig. 8). However, the image we see now differs from the previous one in terms of framing and image quality. It is, first, a medium close up, which means that the camera becomes more intimate and brings us closer to her. Secondly, the image of her is more pixelated, and is thus apparently that from the monitor, a fact that once more draws attention to a mediation which is rendered visible and sensible by the materiality of the image, its grainy texture.

In the second half of the sequence, Deniz starts to speak about a film she has recently seen on TV, the afore-mentioned *À nos amours* by Maurice Pialat. However, she does not reveal the film title and, unless the viewer knows Pialat's film, we do not know what film she is referring to. Rather than pointing out clearly why she liked the film, she summarizes it. We get to know that *À nos amours* is a film about love, centred on an adolescent girl who struggles with having long-term relationships and being faithful. The film's female protagonist has various affairs and frequently changes boyfriends. Her situation at home becomes more complicated when her father leaves the family because of a new woman. Eventually, she gets married, but she soon separates from her husband and starts a relationship with a friend of his. "So endet der Film," Deniz says, after which the audition comes to an end.

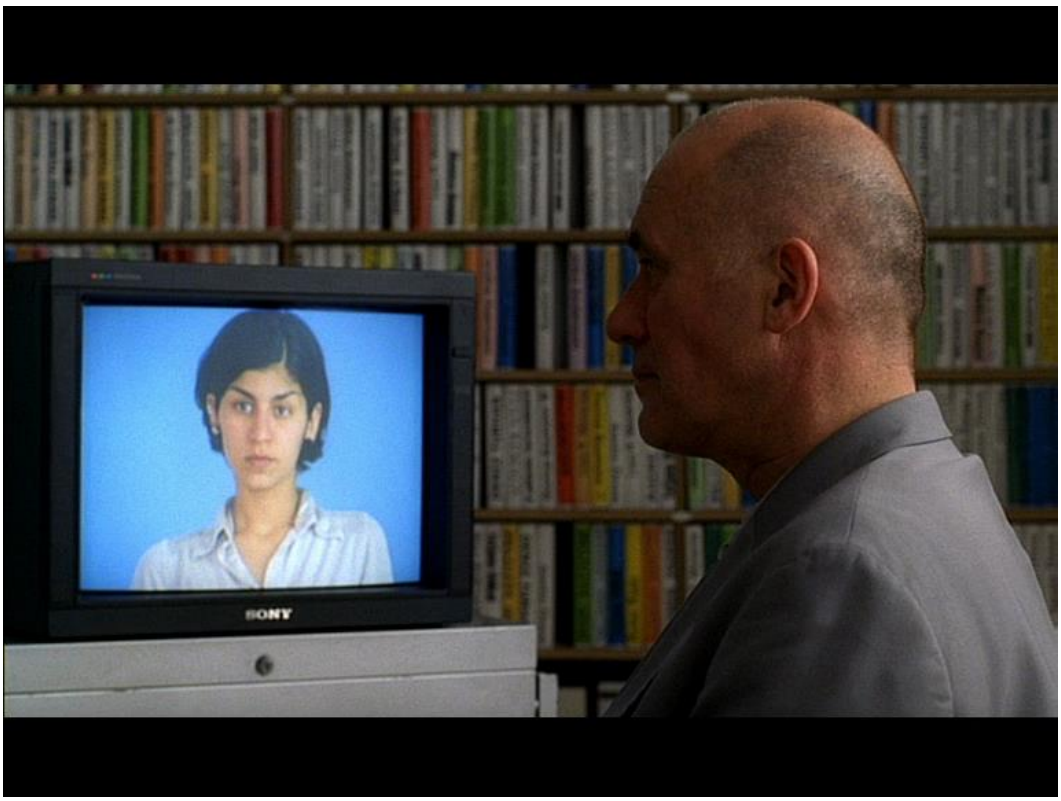
SONY

FIGURE 5 / 6 / 7 / 8: MEDIATION RENDERED SENSIBLE

On the figurative level, Deniz's summary of *À nos amours* contributes to the film's subject matter. There is a certain resemblance between Deniz's own situation and that of the girl in Pialat's film; both female characters are in search of love and happiness

but struggle to achieve it. Despite the fact that it is not Deniz's own story, the question of the adolescent female character in Pialat's film becomes hers to a certain extent, which is a result both of the way she tells the story and of how she is filmed. Deniz's film synopsis lasts three minutes, and with the exception of two short cuts back to the other people in the scene (director, producer and cameraman), she is framed in close-up by a static camera. The camera here, as for the most part of the film, functions as a patient observer. As Arslan has explained the use of camera in his films:

> I attempt to work with the camera as objectively as I can. I see the camera as an autonomous part of filmmaking; it is not there primarily to trigger emotions. I am interested in letting the emotions evolve more indirectly, not in forcing them through the media.[297]

Arslan's attitude to cinematography can thus be seen as a further link to *À nos amours*. In an essay entitled "Kinoerfahrungen" (re-published in English as "Cinema of Life"), Arslan describes the long-lasting impression Pialat's film made on him:

> In *À nos amours* elaborately planned sequences alternate with simple shot-countershot scenes (scorned by cineastes). The transparent performances of the actors, the decisions about when the camera should be close to them or at a distance—in Pialat, all this is based more on dramaturgy of life than on that of cinema.[298]

The cinematography in Arslan's cinema similarly derives from the "dramaturgy of life," alternating as it does between curious proximity and respectful distance. Critic Katja Nicodemus has described Arslan as "the great companion—the director at eye level. In his work," Nicodemus writes, "the cinematographic form always appears to derive from the individual moment, to accompany the characters like an accomplice and to ally itself with them."[299] This realist approach, however, should not be mistaken for naturalism; it involves stylisation. Thanks to the observational mode and 'objective' camerawork, the film provokes immediacy, an immediacy, however, which does not hinder Arslan from highlighting the mediation and constructedness of reality.

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[297] Thomas Arslan in Michael Baute, "Opening to the World: A Portrait of Director Thomas Arslan," *German Film Quarterly* 2 (2013): 8–9.
[298] Thomas Arslan, "The Cinema of Life," in *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, ed. Rajendra Roy and Anke Leweke (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 85.
[299] Nicodemus, "On the Move," 76.

The paradoxes of contemporary realism

The audition sequence raises the question of how we know what we know about the protagonist (and reality in general). There is in this scene a multiple layering of constructed images, all of which can be read as different perspectives on Deniz. They distinguish themselves from each other by their point of view, which depends on who is looking at her, whether the people in the room (the director, the producer, the cameraman) or us (the spectators). Secondly, the mediation of the image, and therefore its lack of transparency, is problematised. For instance, when Deniz enters the audition room, we get to see her on the monitor, in an already mediated image. Later, the image of her in front of the blue background shifts from a very clear to a more pixelated one, which is apparently that from the monitor. So, who is the 'real' Deniz? Every image, even those we consider real, this sequence seems to say, is constructed. The multiple perspectives on the protagonist seem to highlight that reality as well as a person's identity is always complex and ambivalent.

Arslan's films enter a world in which everyday life is constantly mediated through moving images, in which the boundary between physical and mediated reality has become more and more blurred. Contemporary realist cinema is thus confronted with new questions and challenges in its quest to represent reality. For filmmakers conscious of this issue like Arslan, cinematic realism cannot be found in simple immediacy. Despite or maybe because of its realist aspiration, *Der schöne Tag* poses questions of reality by drawing attention to multi-layered perspectives on the protagonist as well as the mediation, and therefore construction, of the image. Images as well as reality, this film (and its director) seems to suggest, are multi-layered and often mediated: they depend significantly on the spectator's point of view and perspective. The audition scene can thus be read as a meta-sequence of *Der schöne Tag*, as it highlights both the complexity of perspectives on Deniz and the level of mediation of her image. On the one hand, the sequence takes time out and gives us the opportunity to observe the protagonist. We are faced, on the other hand, with the question of how we know what we know about her.

This takes us to even broader questions related to perception and knowledge. How do we perceive the world? How do we gain knowledge about an object? How can we experience it? And how can cinema contribute? As the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has argued,

> By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real […].[300]

According to Baudrillard, the state of the image has passed through different phases, from "the reflection of a profound reality" to the current situation in which the image "has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum."[301] As a consequence, contemporary realist filmmakers are caught in a postmodern dilemma, being aware of the fact that there is no such thing as reality but nevertheless having the desire to grasp it.

Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* makes a phenomenological-material response to Baudrillard's hypothesis of the draining of significance from the physical world. The audition scene, for instance, evokes immediacy by its sheer length (duration) as well as the camera's proximity to Deniz. At the same time, the immediacy of the image is questioned as Arslan makes us aware of its mediation, which is rendered visible and sensible by the materiality of the image—its graininess. However, Arslan's approach differs from what we might call a postmodern attitude and its often ironic ways of dealing with media self-reflexivity. In fact, *Der schöne Tag* adheres to the physical world even when we are reminded to regard immediacy with suspicion. Arslan's film can thus be considered both a material approach to reality and a reflection on the mediation and constructedness of both reality and filmic images, resulting in, as Nicodemus has suggested, "a summery, airy state of ambiguity."[302]

Christian Petzold's *Gespenster*: Imaginative Realities

Likewise, the third film of this study, Christian Petzold's *Gespenster*, provides us with an ambiguous experience of the material world. Among the filmmakers discussed here, Christian Petzold is undoubtedly the best known and most critically acclaimed in

[300] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Flaria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.
[301] Ibid., 6.
[302] Nicodemus, "On the Move," 79.

Germany as well as abroad. Moreover, he enjoys a prominent reputation in both scholarship and film criticism, a status that manifests itself, for instance, in the fact that the Association of German Film Critics has chosen five of Petzold's features as Best Film of the Year: *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am In*, 2001), *Gespenster*, *Yella* (2007), *Jerichow* (2008) and *Barbara* (2012). For his breakthrough film *Die innere Sicherheit*, he also obtained the "Lola," the Federal Film Prize in Gold, the German equivalent of the Academy Award and a prize that is usually reserved for far more commercial productions. For *Barbara,* Petzold, moreover, won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin Film Festival, and even though Petzold has not yet reached the same heights as other contemporary European auteurs such as Michael Haneke or the Dardenne brothers, he is widely regarded as the most influential contemporary German filmmaker, functioning as kind of a connecting link between the first and second generation of Berlin School directors.

Like Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan, Petzold graduated from the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin and similarly to them, he is not originally from the capital but the former West Germany. Petzold was born 1960 in Hilden and grew up largely in Haan, small towns in North Rhine-Westphalia, somewhere between Düsseldorf, the well-off state-capital, and the Ruhr region, the country's industrial heart. Petzold has frequently described the places of his childhood and adolescence as transitional spaces, an element that retains a great influence on the choice of locations and their representation in his films.[303] In 1981, after having finished the *Abitur* and civil service, Petzold moved to Berlin and enrolled for a degree in German literature and theatre studies at the Freie Universität, obtaining his master's degree with a thesis on the German literature *enfant terrible* Rolf-Dieter Brinkmann. In 1987, still a literary student at the FU Berlin, Petzold applied to the *Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie* (DFFB) but was at first rejected. One year later, Petzold was accepted at the DFFB, where he was a student from 1989 to 1994.

To date, Petzold has made thirteen feature films, far more than any other director associated with the Berlin School. Since *Gespenster*, and with the exception of Petzold's latest feature *Phoenix* (2014), all his films have premiered at the competitions of the major festivals in Berlin or Venice. Even though only *Barbara* has attracted more

[303] See Jaimey Fisher, *Christian Petzold* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 147–48.

than 100.000 theatrical viewers in Germany (*Gespenster*: 27.261, *Yella*, 72.730, *Jerichow*: 99.357, *Barbara* 369.415, *Phoenix* 93.087), Petzold's films have achieved significantly greater cinema audience success than any of his Berlin School peers.[304] Apart from Petzold's films, only Maren Ade's surprise success *Alle Anderen* (*Everyone Else*, 2009) has reached more than 100.000 theatrical viewers; in fact, no other Berlin School film has had more than 50.000 cinema spectators in Germany (most far fewer).[305] Moreover, many of Petzold's films have found international distributors and achieved (limited) releases in other European countries as well as in the United States, although only *Barbara* reached a bigger audience, with more than 300.000 viewers in France alone. Thanks to this relative commercial success, Petzold may actually be the only director associated with the Berlin School who does not have to fear that his next project will not be financed.

In writings on Petzold's films, scholars and critics have paid special attention to the director's so-called ghost trilogy, a cycle comprising *Die innere Sicherheit*, *Gespenster* and *Yella*. Initially, Petzold intended to entitle *Die innere Sicherheit* 'Ghosts,' a term which eventually became the title of the trilogy's second part.[306] Certainly, what these three films have in common are their ghostlike protagonists, who in one way or another have fallen out of society and/or history. Petzold has explained that his interest in the concept of ghosts results from his many conversations with acclaimed documentary/essay filmmaker Harun Farocki, Petzold's former teacher at the DFFB, who subsequently became a friend and regular collaborator on the screenplays for his films. Petzold noted that in preproduction for *Die innere Sicherheit*

> I began to think whether it is not the case that the cinema does not always tell stories about ghosts anyway: stories of people who have fallen out of love, out of work processes, people for whom there is no use anymore. Through these reflections we ended up moving from *Die innere Sicherheit*, which concerns the political left and terrorism, to the girls in *Gespenster,* who have no biography, no genealogy, and for whom the generalized labor process has no use, to, finally,

[304] Data taken from www.ffa.de, the website of the German Federal Film Board (FFA).
[305] See www.ffa.de
[306] In the time between *Die innere Sicherheit* and Gespenster, Petzold made two more films, *Toter Mann* (*Something to Remind Me*, 2002) and *Wolfsburg* (2003), which were produced for television, though the latter eventually got a theatrical release.

> *Yella*, which is a film about a woman who exists in a twilight zone between death and life.[307]

Petzold has largely been regarded as the most strongly political among the directors associated with the Berlin School. Petzold's cinema, as Marco Abel suggests, "in effect cinematically forges *for the viewer* new relations to this very material set of forces structuring the conditions of possibility for living in 'Germany' in the postunification era. In so doing, it actively participates in the very process of reformulating 'the political' […]," [308] a project to which, as Abel further suggests, not only Petzold but also his fellow Berlin School directors contribute. What in Abel's view "is unique to Petzold's work (perhaps with the exception of Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt*) is the fact that on the level of his images (and their ontological status), his films confront most directly the internal changes in capitalism in Germany over the course of the last quarter century as the most era-defining set of events for 'Germany.'" [309] For Jaimey Fisher, on the other hand, Petzold refunctions and thus politicises genre cinema. In the first book-length study on Petzold's work, Fisher argues that Petzold, more than any other contemporary auteur filmmaker, deals with popular forms. As Fisher suggests, Petzold's cinema can be considered a "ghostly archaeology of genre," [310] an approach that draws attention to the many examples of genre cinema that have served as inspirations for Petzold's work, be it Kathryn Bigelow's vampire film *Near Dark* for *Die innere Sicherheit*, Herk Harvey's horror B-movie *Carnival of Souls* for *Yella* or the various cinematic adaptations of the pulp-novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (including Luchino Visconti's *Ossesione*) for *Jerichow*.

In the case of *Gespenster*, however, it is not genre cinema but another popular form, the fairy tale, namely *Das Totenhemdchen* (*The Burial Shirt*) by the Grimm brothers, which served as one of Petzold's intertexts for the film. Petzold, who came across *Das Totenhemdchen* when reading Grimms' fairy tales to his daughter, has hinted at the brutality of these fables, many of which, written during a desperate time period, the Thirty Years' War, were meant to console.[311] *Das Totenhemdchen* is a very short

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[307] Christian Petzold in Marco Abel, "'The Cinema of Identification Gets on My Nerves': An Interview with Christian Petzold," *Cineaste*, Summer 2008, http://www.cineaste.com/articles/an-interview-with-christian-petzold.htm.
[308] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 74.
[309] Ibid., 78–79.
[310] Fisher, *Christian Petzold*.
[311] Christian Petzold, "Director's Note," *Gespenster press kit*.

fable concerned with the death of a little boy and the mother's way of dealing with the traumatic event. The mother cannot overcome the loss—she cries every day and night––, and due to her grieving the child cannot enter heaven. Later, the little boy appears to his mother in a burial shirt, sitting at the table or playing as he used to do when he was still alive. He desperately begs his mother to stop mourning, but it takes a while before she can finally let him go.

The most interesting aspect of Petzold's ghost films in relation to this study is the correlation they make between fantasy—or rather, imagination—and reality, two realms that are regularly regarded as entirely oppositional. The fantastic elements in Petzold's cinema do not stand in contrast but rather form part of the director's material approach to reality. These features are most prominently visible and audible in *Gespenster*, Petzold's seventh feature-length film and the middle part of his ghost trilogy, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2005. In the following reading of *Gespenster*, I will examine how the film's adherence to the material world—both in relation to the image and sound—is used in a way that also foregrounds its imaginary qualities.

Gespenster opens with a car drive through Berlin's inner-city motorway, filmed from the front window, a shot which, as we do not see the driver, we may consider a 'phantom ride.' This is accompanied by *Bäche von gesalznen Zähren* (Streams of salted tears), a movement from Johann Sebastian Bach's church cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* (I had much trouble in my heart), a piece that deals with the themes of mourning, pain and suffering. The music immediately sets the tone and the mood of the film: a melange of beauty and sadness, melancholia perhaps. (In fact, the aria has already started during the opening credits and will be played on three more occasions in the film). This first shot fascinates by virtue of its dream-like quality; it appears simultaneously real and unreal, a consequence of the music and the fact that the car seems to hover on the slightly curved and sloping street, which somehow prefigures the various steadicam sequences in the film that achieve a similar effect. When the film cuts to the interior of the car, we get to see the driver, Pierre (Aurélien Recoing), who is depicted at close quarters in a close up from diagonally behind his face, while the city outside the side window is distorted (out of focus). The glorious Bach cantata continues but will shortly be interrupted by the profane female voice in French of the car's GPS system telling Pierre to turn left at the next possible opportunity. Pierre is on his way to

pick up his wife, Françoise (Marianne Basler), from a hospital or psychiatric facility. As we will shortly learn, Françoise still mourns her daughter Marie, who was abducted in Berlin when she was very little and apparently remains missing. Françoise has not yet overcome the loss and hopes to find her daughter, whom she repeatedly believes to identify in other girls. (Of course, the Françoise character derives from the mother of the fairy tale.)

The film then cuts to a girl—first in long shot, then in medium close up—, who is surrounded by huge trees in the slightly overgrown part of the Tiergarten, Berlin's large wooded central park. The change of location from an urban (from the inside of Pierre's car driving through the city) to a natural environment is signalled not only visually but, more intensively, on the auditory level. Having listened to the Bach cantata before, we now perceive the omnipresent ambient sound of the Tiergarten, the highly amplified rustling of tree leave. This close adherence to ambient sounds, a crucial feature of Petzold's cinema, will now be examined in more detail.

The imaginative force of ambient sounds

Gespenster's use of ambient sounds can be regarded as characteristic for Petzold's attitude to the auditory world. Besides the rustling of tree leaves, the film's most remarkable noise, *Gespenster* provides us with a variety of sounds. Petzold's films rely almost exclusively on diegetic sound, though extra-diegetic music is not regarded as totally illegitimate, as demonstrated by the sparsely employed scores of the composer Stefan Will, one of Petzold's long-term collaborators, in, for instance, *Die Innere Sicherheit* and *Jerichow*. The repeatedly employed Bach cantata in *Gespenster*, too, appears to derive from a diegetic source, the CD player in Pierre's car, though we cannot be sure since we do not get to see the source. Petzold thus belongs to the circle of independent international filmmakers whose prominent practice—"the eschewal of empathetic score music"—, according to film scholar Jay Beck, "reconfigures the rules of cinematic representation."[312] Beck observes "a strong tendency among directors outside the commercial mainstream to dispense with nondiegetic orchestral scores in favor of constructing carefully detailed soundscapes."[313]

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[312] Jay Beck, "Acoustic Auteurs and Transnational Cinema," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, ed. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog, and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 734.
[313] Ibid.

In Petzold's cinema, we can detect several similarities to the approaches to mundane sonic reality to which Beck refers, and that are also visible in the films of Schanelec and Arslan as elaborated above. Yet there are some particularities in the way Petzold makes use of the auditory level, in relation to both its treatment and its effect, which distinguish his method slightly from Arslan's and Schanelec's. They include in particular the imaginative force of sound that Petzold seems to be exploring in his poetic use of ambient noises of, above all, natural places, as well as in his introduction of what may be called 'thematic' songs.

Analogously to his Berlin School director peers, Petzold aims to explore the acoustic materiality of places. The ambient sounds of *Gespenster* thus stem from real locations, and from original sources mostly visible in the image: "[S]tatt künstliche Windgeräusche einzufügen, haben wir im Tiergarten sehr viele Originaltöne aufgenommen. Wir haben versucht, den Ort zu hören." [314] In an interview on the occasion of the film's premiere at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival, Petzold describes how, in preparation for the film, location viewings became exercises in listening:

> Normalerweise geht man im Vorfeld einer Produktion mit dem Kameramann die Motive ab. Ich habe immer darauf bestanden, dass auch der Tontechniker, Andreas Mücke, mitkommt. Manchmal standen wir einfach da, mit geschlossenen Augen […] und haben gehört. Der Tiergarten hat eine Akustik, die ich noch nirgendwo auf der Welt vernommen habe. Die Stadt ist wahnsinnig nah und gleichzeitig wahnsinnig weit weg. Und irgendwie ist das Kino ja auch so etwas: ganz nah und gleichzeitig ganz weit weg.[315]

Petzold's statement draws attention to the director's desire not to subjugate the auditory to the visual level, an attitude which, as Roger F. Cook suggests, is characteristic of Berlin School cinema as a whole: "Rather than follow the mainstream practice that relegates audio to a supporting role for visually constructed film narrative, Berlin School filmmakers give more autonomy to sound and direct the viewer to audio and visual signals that lie outside the normal regime of cinematic attention." [316] The relative autonomy of the auditory field, Petra Löffler argues (with reference to Deleuze), provokes the spectator's imagination:

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[314] Christian Petzold in Cristina Nord, "'Mit geschlossenen Augen hören,'" *die tageszeitung*, February 15, 2005, http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/?dig=2005/02/15/a0230.
[315] Christian Petzold in ibid.
[316] Roger F. Cook, "Ambient Sound," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 28.

> Die akustischen Reize, die der Film aussendet, erreichen den Zuschuer, der ja zugleich Zuhörer ist, neben und abseits der Bilder, die er sieht. Sie adressieren und affizieren ihn zugleich unterschwellig und direkt, indem sie ihn in den artifiziellen Resonanzraum einbegreifen, die der Kinosall um ihn herum aufbaut. Die Stimmen und Geräsche, die dort zu hören sind, resonieren zugleich die Imagination des Filmzuschauers. Das Sichtbare und das Hörbare können […] als zwei Ebenen oder Seiten der kinematographischen Imagination verstanden werden, die durch das Wechselspiel von Erscheinen und Verschwinden, Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit strukturiert wird. Auf diese Weise können rein optisch-akustische Bilder entstehen, die Bilder sind, "ohne Metapher zu sein."[317]

Petzold's approach, moreover, relies on sound's capacity to grasp the physicality of places, things and people. In *Gespenster*, the rustling of the trees, "preternaturally audible"[318] through Petzold's frequently employed technique of sound amplification, reveals the physicality of the actual place, the Tiergarten. Yet, due to the intensification of the material world via sound (in conjunction with the image), the film reveals the mysterious and imaginative qualities of the location, which, in turn, highlights the film's fairy-tale-like tendencies.

This treatment of sound relates to Kracauer's idea of cinema's ability to redeem physical reality. For Kracauer, "the ripple of the leaves stirred by the wind" (taken from a comment on a Lumière film, quoted twice in *Theory of Film*), can be regarded as one of the 'small moments of everyday life' that "open up a dimension much wider that of the plots which they sustain."[319] Or, as Bazin very similarly puts it, "the trembling of just one branch in the wind […] would be enough to conjure up all the forests of the world." [320] Though Kracauer and Bazin here refer to cinema's visual level, their comments can easily be applied to sound. In fact, the highly amplified wind noises of the Tiergarten in *Gespenster* evoke a wonder that goes beyond the actual place. Thanks to their indeterminacy, sounds like these may "function as an ignition spark" and "touch off chain reactions in the moviegoer—a flight of associations," [321] as Kracauer has suggested for film images.

Wind is a motif we can find not only in several of Petzold's films—from *Die innere Sicherheit* to *Barbara*—but also in the work of other Berlin School directors. In Berlin

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[317] Petra Löffler, "Ghost Sounds und die kinematographische Imagination: Christian Petzolds *Gespenster* und *Yella*," in *Kino in Bewegung: Perspektiven des deutschen Gegenwartfilms*, ed. Thomas Schick and Tobias Ebbrecht (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), 64–65.
[318] Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 80.
[319] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 303.
[320] Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," 111.
[321] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 165.

School cinema, Chris Homewood argues, "[a]mbient wind noises […] become representations of outer and inner landscapes," which he demonstrates through examples from two of Petzold's films as well as Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*. "Such diegetic sounds (in conjunction with the images) intensify the materiality of the everyday, thus rendering it 'affectively sensible' to the viewer. The acoustics of wind, therefore, has the power to communicate greater 'truths' than the characters' spoken words. In the cinema of the Berlin School, the story is carried more on the wind than by characters themselves."[322] This holds true not only for wind noises but for ambient sounds in general, which tend to become more significant than dialogue and narrative. Apart from the rustling of tree leaves, Roger F. Cook has detected other natural ambient sounds frequently used in Berlin School cinema such as the chirping of birds (which we hear repeatedly in *Gespenster*, inside and outside of the Tiergarten) and splashing or lapping water." Yet, despite the variety of natural noises, Cook suggests that "[t]he ambient sound encountered most often is that of street and highway traffic. As a common part of our modern lifestyle, noise from motor vehicles is prevalent in many feature films, often contributing to the intensity of action or dialogue. In the work of Berlin School directors, the noise adheres more to a naturalistic sound perspective and is, at the same time, tied more integrally to the, if not explicitly articulated, themes in their films."[323]

The naturalist adherence to traffic noise, which I have already noted as a dominant element of the city soundscapes in Schanelec's *Marseille* and Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, can also be observed in Petzold's *Gespenster*. Here, street noise repeatedly mixes with the chirping of birds and the characters' body sounds. As a consequence of the treatment of ambient sound, the film opens itself up to contingencies and reveals the cacophony of the city. But it also moves into the realm of what might be called fantastic realism.

Fantastic realism

The girl in the midst of the rustling tree leaves in the Tiergarten is Nina (Julia Hummer) and her work—picking up rubbish from the grass—seems to be either community labour

[322] Chris Homewood, "Wind," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 284.
[323] Cook, "Ambient Sound," 30.

or one of the low-paid, state-subsidised jobs that have become known as "1-Euro-Jobs."[324] This sequence already demonstrates the film's rooting in social reality, as critic Georg Seeßlen has emphasised: "Schon mit den ersten Einstellungen ist man in einer besonderen Wirklichkeit. Man sieht etwas, das man jeden Tag sieht und von dem man im gleichen Moment merkt, dass man es nie gesehen hat: Der Alltag."[325] In the next sequence, the realism is heightened by Nina's witnessing of a young woman, Toni, being attacked and beaten up by two men. While walking towards the scene, she finds Toni's earring on the path, and shortly after this she helps her to hide when Toni, after an attempted theft, is chased by Nina's boss and fellow workers. The two girls leave the park to have breakfast and then go to the place where Nina lives, a facility for young people.

This is however probably the only scene that offers information about the two girls' social background. In Toni's case, we do not even know where/how/with whom she lives. As Petzold has remarked,

> It's an interesting effect […] When a film starts with two girls coming home from school, throwing their schoolbags in the corner and going off for ice cream, then they have an immediate social definition. But the girls played by Sabine Timoteo and Julia Hummer are different; they don't have homes or a place to define them; no social definition.[326]

Petzold's remark is significant insofar as it draws attention, first, to the fact that Nina and Toni have no social space that defines them, an aspect that, secondly, relates to the question of how Petzold's films take part in the cinematic representation of the socially defined mundane. The girls' homelessness, and especially Nina's desire for belonging, are articulated by their restlessness and the fact that for most part of the film they are on the move. Moreover, Petzold deliberately avoids equipping the characters with a backstory, a detail his films share with those of other Berlin School directors. This is one of the many voids [*Leerstellen*] in his cinema that departs from the naturalism of ambient sound, moving instead to provoke the viewers' imagination in ways that, according to Johanna Schwenk, are essential for Petzold's work.[327]

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[324] The so-called 1 Euro-Jobs were implemented at the beginning of the 2000s by the coalition government of Social Democrats and the Greens as part of the neoliberal reforms of the labour market ("Agenda 2010").

[325] Georg Seeßlen, "Gegen die Verhältnisse," *die tageszeitung*, September 14, 2005.

[326] Christian Petzold in "Interview with Christian Petzold," *Gespenster press kit*.

[327] Johanna Schwenk, *Leerstellen—Resonanzräume: Zur Ästhetik der Auslassung im Werk des Filmregisseurs Christian Petzold* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012).

In *Gespenster* however, this cinematic strategy is intensified to highlight the two girls' ghostliness, the fact that, as Petzold has suggested, they "have no biography, no genealogy."[328] Or, as Georg Seeßlen put it: "Sie haben keine soziale Heimat, nicht einmal eine 'Hood', kein Milieu, keine Codes. Sie haben keine genaues Woher und Wohin, ihre Menschengewissheit liegt außerhalb der Handlung, außerhalb jenes Raumes, den eine Kamera vielleicht suchen, aber auf keinen Fall mehr 'festhalten' kann." [329] If we characterise a film like *Gespenster* as ghostly, we need to clarify that we do not get to see literal ghosts here as in mainstream or B-movie genre cinema: no zombies, no vampires (in fact, the only part of Petzold's ghost trilogy which partially deals with supernatural elements is *Yella*). However, the notion of 'ghosts' is also not reducible to a mere metaphor. As Jaimey Fisher has remarked,

> Petzold explores how people's desires and fantasies become behaviourally productive—in fact, like fantasies, they serve as such a stark driving force that their diegetic status as mere fantasy or dream becomes unclear. The fact that the diegetic status of these desires is unclear—are they 'real' or not?—underscores their power and pertinence for Petzold's characters, who live the putative fantasy like reality. Living fantasy as reality is especially true of ghosts, who are often unaware of their own spectral status and strive […] to break through to normality.[330]

Nina and Toni are social outsiders, or maybe, at least in Toni's case, even outlaws, who, as Petzold suggests, live in a bubble that separates them from society, or what we may call, somewhat simplistically, the bourgeois class. Both girls are excluded from the (primary) labour market: Nina's work is precarious, located at the lowest end of capitalist society, and involving humiliation by her boss. Toni does not seem to work at all; instead, she is depicted as involved in various attempts at shoplifting. "If Petzold's films are full of ghosts—the remnants of such collective crises and transitions—," as Fisher further suggests, "then these residual specters haunt, in abeyance, emergent socioeconomic formations."[331] In precisely this sense, Nina and Toni can be regarded as ghosts, not as representations but as embodied shadows of society in the age of neoliberalism.

At this point, it is appropriate to mention Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's vampire film *Nosferatu* (1922), one of Petzold's long-time favourites. In fact, the original title of

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[328] Christian Petzold in Abel, "Cinema of Identification."
[329] Seeßlen, "Gegen die Verhältnisse."
[330] Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 93.
[331] Ibid., 19.

Gespenster was a reference to an intertitle of the silent masterpiece: "Als er über die Brücke ging, kamen ihm die Gespenster entgegen." What links Petzold's ghost story to Murnau's adaptation of Bram Stroker's *Dracula* is that both films are located at the threshold of realism and fantasy. For Petzold, who has regularly demanded a cinema that amalgamates physicality and imagination, "gibt [es] ja nichts Schlimmeres als Traumbilder, mit […] Nebel oder Unschärfen. […] Ich finde, es geht darum, dass sich die Impressionen und das Virtuelle, das Imaginäre mit dem Realen unwiederbringlich vermischen."[332] This melange is precisely what Karl Prümm considers essential for Petzold's "fantastic realism,"

> Die genau abgetasteten Oberflächen, die Materialität der Dinge, die Konkretion der Bauten und der Räume, die mit dokumentarischem Gestus aufgezeichneten Alltäglichkeiten, werden unterminiert durch die Figuren, die nicht nur im Realen verankert sind, sondern aus anderen Sphären kommen und anderen Welten zustreben. […] Das Reale gewinnt phantastische, das Phantastische reale Konturen.[333]

Prümm's notion of fantastic realism brings us back, moreover, to Kracauer. Despite his general objections against filmmakers "turn[ing] the spotlight on a historical subject or ventures into the realm of fantasy,"[334] Kracauer argued that "if the fantastic is mainly built from 'realistic material,' the 'relational' factor ceases to be a decisive issue. In other words, it no longer matters much whether or not fantasies lay claim to the same validity as physical reality; provided they concentrate on real-life shots, they conform to the basic properties of the medium."[335] By blurring the boundaries between reality and phantasy, Petzold's films render our world strange in ways that accord with Kracauer's idea of a cinema that builds fantasy from the materiality of the real. Undoubtedly, Petzold's cinema is deeply rooted in the physical world. By clinging to the materiality of natural objects, bodies and places, on the one hand, and taking into account the imaginative force of the characters' desires and fantasies, on the other, *Gespenster* creates what Petzold calls "Schwebezustand," a state held in abeyance. The girls' ghostlike status becomes sensible, for instance, through Petzold's extensive use of the steadicam, which was used, he explains,

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[332] Christian Petzold in Schwenk, *Leerstellen*.
[333] Karl Prümm, "Der Geisterfotograf: Ein Porträt des Autors und Regisseurs Christian Petzold," *AugenBlick* 47 (2011): 65.
[334] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 77.
[335] Ibid., 90.

> for the first time on *Toter Mann*, in a park scene where a man was following a woman. With the steadicam, I could go along in front of him or behind him, which gave the sequence something dream-like. The characters lose their definitions and circle around each other. For *Ghosts* I thought that when ghost children, who live in a bubble, want to get out of the bubble, they should be filmed exactly like that park sequence.[336]

The freely hovering images produced by the steadicam do indeed provoke a sort of dream-like reality, an effect that, in addition to the particular use of the camera, results from the physicality of the actual environment, the Tiergarten, as well as the area around the Potsdamer Platz. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer noted of the relationship between film's dreamlike character and the pro-filmic world:

> Perhaps films look most like dreams when they overwhelm us with the crude and unnegotiated presence of natural objects—as if the camera had just now extricated them from the womb of physical existence and as if the umbilical cord between image and actuality had not yet been severed. There is something in the abrupt immediacy and shocking veracity of such pictures that justifies their identification as dream images.[337]

Kracauer suggests here that the dreamlike quality of filmic images is closely linked to and even intensified by the materiality of the pro-filmic world: a notion that distinguishes itself from a sociologically motivated critique of cinema's (as mass entertainment in general) escapist tendencies (and is probably an unspoken reference to Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Critique of the Culture Industry*). Rather, what matters to Kracauer is "whether film as film contains dream-like elements which on their part send the audience dreaming."[338]

Material ghosts

Up to this point, I have emphasised that *Gespenster*, like Petzold's cinema in general, relies deeply on an adherence to the physical world, suggesting that, in accordance with Kracauer's statement above, the film's fantastic elements, its fairy-tale atmosphere, result not from turning away but instead from clinging to material phenomena. By making use of the allusiveness and ambiguity of natural objects, their "*signaletic force* rather than their signifying quality"[339] (Marco Abel via Deleuze), Petzold's material

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[336] Christian Petzold in "Interview with Christian Petzold."
[337] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 164.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 75.

approach offers us a sensory encounter with the world. Let us finally consider two more aspects of the film's ghostliness as evoked by its images, both of which raise ontological questions that further complicate our understanding of Petzold's materialism.

Many critics and scholars have emphasised the importance in Berlin School cinema of observation, which regularly appears to be accorded preference over narration and dramaturgy. Eric Rentschler, for instance, considers observation "an act of faith for the Berlin School."[340] Rentschler also draws attention to the close kinship between observation and surveillance. In view of the Berlin School films' observational character, it is thus hardly surprising that several directors have made use of surveillance images, including Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler and, above all, Christian Petzold.

The latter's particular interest in questions of surveillance is undoubtedly related to Harun Farocki's lifelong engagement with this theme. In addition, Michael Klier's *Der Riese* (*The Giant*, 1984*)*, a video film consisting merely of CCTV footage recorded in several West German cities, had a massive impact on Petzold, as he explained in a TV interview:

> Der heißt "Der Riese," weil die Überwachungskameras immer von oben auf die Welt schauen und weil der Riese auch jemand ist, der groß ist und von oben auf die Menschen schaut. Aber gleichzeitig ist der Riese auch immer ein bisschen tumb. Die Überwachungskameras sind auch ein bisschen tumb. Wenn sie schwenken, ruckelt der Schwenk, sie sind nicht elegant, sie sind grobschlächtig. Das Kino könnte dort unten, auf der Augenhöhe der überwachten Personen, eigentlich losgehen. Aber der Riese ist zu weit oben und zu tumb dazu, die Geschichten, die er beobachtet, zu verstehen oder denen auf der Ebene der Menschen zu folgen. So erzählt der Film von Michael Klier auch vom Ende des Kinos in irgendeiner Form.[341]

Petzold highlights here the ambiguous as well as dystopian character of the film's automated images. Since his second feature *Die Beischlafdiebin* (*The Sex Thief*, 1998), Petzold has repeatedly inserted surveillance footage into his films, and numerous ideas for these scenes, as he further explains, stem from the continuing influence of Klier's *Der Riese*. Yet unlike in Klier's film, surveillance images in Petzold's cinema are not actual documentary footage but rather modulated images that give the impression of

[340] Rentschler, "Predecessors," 218.
[341] Christian Petzold in Sven von Reden and Reinhard Wulf, "Interview mit Christian Petzold: Auszug aus dem Kinomagazin," *3sat*, October 17, 2005.

surveillance footage, such as the CCTV images displaying Jeanne's exploration of the bank as well as the subsequent robbery by her parents in *Die innere Sicherheit*, or the eponymous heroine depositing money in the post office in *Yella*.

In *Gespenster*, there are two sequences of ostensible surveillance footage. The first consists of three CCTV camera shots, which take place approximately forty minutes into the film and show Nina and Toni in an H&M store during shoplifting. Previously, we have seen the girls detaching security tags from clothes in the changing rooms. Then, without any prior indication, the film cuts to a CCTV image, which displays the girls on their way through the store, heading towards the exit (Fig. 9). The change in image quality to a streaky image with a blue tinge immediately strikes the eye, as does the different camera angle (high-angle instead of the eye-level shots that are sustained throughout the rest of the film). Whereas the first shot is static, the following one zooms in to Nina, panning and tilting to keep her within the frame in a rather bumpy manner that recalls the 'Grobschlächtigkeit' that Petzold discerns in the surveillance footage in Klier's *Der Riese*.

In addition, the point of audition has altered: the camera movements in the second shot are clearly audible, a detail that emphasises the sensation of surveillance and makes us wonder who is in control of the security camera, the 'dumb giant,' depicting Nina. The suspense is heightened by the next security camera image, a static shot showing the entrance/exit area of the shopping centre to which the H&M store belongs, which is watched by a security guard next to the doors. When Nina exits the building, the film cuts back to 'regular' images, cutting to a close-up of Nina from behind, discerning her shoulder, neck and head. A possible point of-view-shot: is someone following her? The impression becomes certainty when a hand grasps Nina's shoulder. Yet, Nina is not caught by the security forces, as one might think (and Petzold plays with this expectation); instead, this is her first encounter with Françoise.

Petzold's use of apparent CCTV material could very easily be considered a critique of the increasing surveillance practices that pervade public spaces and workplaces. But despite the director's explicitly critical attitude towards current surveillance societies (an attitude that is also very evident in Farocki's films on the subject), the surveillance camera images in Petzold's cinema are more ambiguous, and therefore lack a clear political massage. Petzold's films repeatedly confront us with this crucial part of our everyday realities, yet they approach it not from a standpoint of

unambiguous critique, but rather by rendering sensible the mode of looking that constitutes surveillance. The surveillance footage in Petzold's cinema has hardly any narrative function. In this way, Petzold's approach differs not only from Farocki, but also from films like Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006), in which surveillance is an essential part of the narrative, or Michael Haneke's *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005), which directly challenges the viewer with (ethical) questions of spectatorship. Rather, in Petzold's *Gespenster* surveillance camera images, which form part of our everyday realities, are presented in such a casual and fragmented way that their significance remains open and ambiguous. The unsettling effect of these scenes—like those of similar nature in *Die innere Sicherheit*, *Wolfsburg* or *Yella*—results primarily from an abrupt change of register from surveillance image to apparently unmediated reality. Due to their different visual quality—their texture and colour—, these 'ghost images' represent small disturbances within the film. As critic Daniel Kothenschulte has pointed out,

> Von Geisterbildern sprach man früher, wenn die Fernsehantenne schlecht eingestellt war oder ein Gewitter zu so genannten Überreichweiten geführt hatte. Dann konnte man plötzlich das Gesicht der belgischen Ansagerin über dem Kölner Tatort ausmachen. Wie ihren Besitzern entlaufene Spiegelbilder hatten sie frech alle Reichweitengrenzen überwunden. Heute, wo selbst das Schwarzweiß aus dem Fernsehen verschwunden ist, können uns höchstens noch die Überwachungskameras mit solchen Geisterbildern irritieren. Sie allein haben die Hoheit über das weiße Rauschen.[342]

Thus, Petzold's rather ambiguous use of these 'ghost images' provokes a sensation—a strange wonder—within the fictional stories, disruptions among the film's 'regular' shots intended, as cameraman Hans Fromm explains, to achieve a mode of spectatorship in which "you don't sense the camera."[343] Since the 'dumb giant' is anything but unobtrusive, the surveillance sequences make us aware of the camera and, in so doing, the intentionality behind images; an experience which make us watch the events on screen with more suspicion. Thus, Petzold's critique of surveillance occurs at the aesthetic-sensory level rather than being markedly political.

The second use of surveillance footage in *Gespenster*, which shows the kidnapping of Marie, Françoise's daughter, though similar in appearance, is slightly different in nature. Rather than being a sheer 'document' of an event as in the case of the girls' shoplifting, the CCTV material of Marie's abduction seems to provide an insight

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[342] Daniel Kothenschulte, "Pinocchia," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 15, 2005.
[343] Hans Fromm in "Interview with Hans Fromm," *Gespenster press kit*.

to Françoise's memory. The ghosts of the past are still haunting her, and the surveillance footage seems to be the only visual evidence of the traumatic event. Following a close-up of Françoise driving in a convertible car through a night-time Berlin watching out for Nina—a scene which is accompanied by the Bach cantata—the film cuts, again without prior indication, to a CCTV image displaying a toddler in a shopping trolley that is pulled away by a man outside of a supermarket (Fig. 10), an image that corresponds accurately to the way Françoise described this painful experience to Nina in their first encounter. The camera pans to the left and, in so doing, keeps Marie and her abductor in the frame a little longer before eventually vanishing from sight. This detail makes us aware of the limitations of surveillance camera images (and of images in general) in relation to the frame: the off-screen space.

The music is still playing when the film suddenly cuts back to Françoise, who is now apparently outside the supermarket where her daughter had been abducted. The juxtapositioning of images in this sequence suggests that the CCTV footage of the kidnapping is indeed some kind of memory image. It thus draws attention not so much to the manipulative qualities of CCTV, but to the relation between CCTV footage as a form of social memory, and personal memory images that also impact on our realities. Herein lies the link, moreover, between Petzold's use of surveillance footage and his preoccupation with ghosts. In fact, CCTV images may be seen as a particular form of what physicist-turned-film theorist Gilberto Perez has termed "material ghosts." Perez's term refers to the ambiguous—real yet hallucinatory—status of film images:

> The images on screen carry in them something of the world itself, something material and yet something transposed, transformed into another world, the material ghost. Hence both the peculiar closeness to reality and the no less peculiar suspension from reality, the juncture of world and otherworldliness distinctive of the film image.[344]

[344] Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 28.

FIGURE 9 / 10: MATERIAL GHOSTS

Thanks to their ambiguous status, CCTV images in *Gespenster* evoke cinema's general capacity to create a reality beyond the knowable world: dream images of the material world which, as Kracauer has suggested, may trigger in the spectator "a flight of associations."[345] In this sense, Petzold's use of surveillance footage may be seen as part of an exploration—à la Kracauer—of the ontology of cinema, rather than a form of (unambiguous) ideological critique of surveillance societies.

In the film's final scene, we are confronted with another type of ghost images, Petzold's second starting point for *Gespenster*, in addition to the Grimms' fairy tale, which originate from a stay in the Ardennes where he saw posters of missing children at

[345] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 165.

post offices in Belgium and France. These pictures, containing the latest photo of the girls as well as several further computer-generated images that showed how they might look over a period of years from their date of disappearance to the present day, were for Petzold "strangely ghostlike. In them, you saw visages without any traces of social experience, strangely pale, not of this world. In reality, dead. Ghost portraits."[346] After her second encounter with Françoise, Nina returns to the place in the Tiergarten where she and Toni have discarded Françoise's stolen wallet in a garbage bin. In the wallet, she finds a photo of Marie, Françoise's abducted daughter, as well as an imprint of what appear to be computer-generated images of Marie, projected into the future, the last of which is remarkably similar to Nina (Fig. 11). Despite this resemblance, Nina throws the photos into the bin and continues drifting into the park. The film's ambiguous ending leaves the audience not only with uncertainty in relation to the film's heroine but also with a doubtful status about the truth of the image.[347]

FIGURE 11: GHOST IMAGES

In this chapter, we have been able to observe the strong adherence of films like *Marseille*, *Der schöne Tag* and *Gespenster* to the material world. Moreover, the use of

[346] Christian Petzold in "Interview with Christian Petzold."

[347] As Lutz Koepnick has suggested, "Whereas analog photography, due to its material bond to the object, cannot but remain ensnared to naturalizing ideologies of the real, digital photography—because it suspends the indexical—not only ushers image making into an age of modularity, unfixity, and simulation, but in doing so also reveals the fundamental untruth of all photography—the fact that technological manipulation is at the center of every act of image making." Lutz Koepnick, "In Kracauer's Shadow: Physical Reality and the Digital Afterlife of the Photographic Image," in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 112.

images and sounds by Schanelec, Arslan and Petzold has been seen to be both non-manipulative (in the recording process) and imaginative (in the filmmakers' employment of cinematic techniques and devices such as camerawork, framing and sound). By virtue of their combination of preserving and constructing elements, these films create ambiguous experiences of the visible and audible world. We will now continue our exploration of Berlin School cinema's material approaches to reality with an analysis in the next chapter of the specific relation to human characters in a selection of further films.

4 Object Among Objects: The Human Being as Opaque Surface

> The cinema seems to come into its own when it clings to the surface of things.
>
> SIEGFRIED KRACAUER[348]

We know, among other sources, from Gertrud Koch's extremely informative introduction to Siegfried Kracauer's work that his notion of surface has been regarded as "the key theme in his thinking."[349] The concept of surface, though "by no means unequivocal," [350] as Koch further explains, and used both literally and figuratively throughout his work, can also be considered a central element of Kracauer's material-phenomenological approach to cinema. In *Theory of Film*, the author demands on two occasions that films should cling to the surface of things, a claim that is closely related to the book's central concern: cinema's redemption of physical reality.[351] Both physical reality and surface can be seen as material terms that stand in stark contrast to notions of inner life, soul or psyche. As Christa Robbins has usefully observed, "[t]he word surface can't help but summon up what lies beneath it—a contingent word, inseparably bound to its opposite, to the thing of which it is a part, impossible without its antonyms: inner, deep, full, solid, cover up, sink. There is the surface of something and there is what's below the surface."[352] In *Theory of Film*, however, Kracauer does not subscribe to the common reading of surface as an expression of inner life. Rather, the concentration on exteriority, which he sees as the ultimate virtue of photographic media, is set against its natural opposites: interiority and substance. Unlike the traditional arts, and in particular classical (bourgeois) dramas, cinema should in his view not create meaning but instead "gravitate towards the expanses of outer-reality—an open-ended, limitless world which bears little resemblance to the finite and ordered cosmos set by tragedy."[353] In line with his repeated affirmation of cinema's clinging to the surface of material phenomena, Kracauer thus calls for films that capture the world

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[348] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 285.
[349] Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 23.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, l and 285.
[352] Christa Robbins, "Keywords: Surface," *The Chicago School of Media Theory*, Winter 2002, http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/surface/.
[353] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, l.

we inhabit rather than explaining it: "They seem to be more cinematic, the less they focus directly on inward life, ideology, and spiritual concerns."[354]

Ultimately, Kracauer's notion of surface, as applied to cinema, means nothing other than the medium's 'faithful' adherence to its 'natural' affinity with physical reality. In lieu of relying primarily on ideas or concepts which maintain an impression of the world as a whole, films provide us with fragmentary moments of material existence and, in so doing, allow us to see, hear and sense the world in a new manner. The medium's peculiar encounter with the surface world functions thus as a way out of the process of that abstraction which Kracauer and other thinkers considered an essential component of modernity. As elaborated in the first chapter, *Theory of Film* is embedded in a theory of experience, and based on the assumption that in the process of modernity people's relation to the world has undergone dramatic changes. In Kracauer's view, the collapse of traditional beliefs in modernity did not give rise to a greater sensuous relationship with reality but was instead superseded by new systems of thought, influenced by science and the capitalist economy (though the latter is not mentioned in *Theory of Film*), which led in turn to increasing abstraction and rationalisation.[355] Kracauer considers film an instrument to regain a closer (albeit fragmented and mediated) connection with "the transitory world we live in."[356] Cinema, he argues, provides the alienated modern subject with a rare experience, "the illusion of vicariously partaking of life in its fullness,"[357] and this sensory encounter with reality is rendered possible precisely by the medium's gravitation towards the concrete and the material.

We thus have to think of surface in relation to cinema as the expression of a material approach that enables a mode of perception of the social world, an experience of the materiality of the everyday, as opposed to both interiority and conceptual meaningfulness. Due to the medium's ability to create a sensory experience of material phenomena, Kracauer argues that cinema enables an apprehension of the social world different to abstraction and theorisation, and thus plays a crucial part in the process of forming people's significantly changing subjectivity. The modern subject's relation to the world is understood here as alienated and fragmented:

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[354] Ibid., l–li.

[355] Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann have pointed to the change of focus in Kracauer's argument in *Theory and Film* in relation to his earlier writings, understood as a result of both his own experience as émigré and the difference of historical moments.

[356] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 28.

[357] Ibid., 169.

> There are no wholes in this world; rather, it consists of bits of chance events whose flow substitutes for meaningful continuity. Correspondingly, individual consciousness must be thought of as an aggregate of splinters of beliefs and sundry activities; and since the life of the mind lacks structure, impulses from psychosomatic regions are apt to surge up and fill the interstices. Fragmentized individuals act out their parts in fragmentized reality.[358]

What has been considered a rather naïve concept of film as the simple reproduction of reality reveals itself here as deeply modernist; Kracauer's realism not only favours fragmentary moments over narrative closure but also argues against the centrality of human characters and their psychologisation on screen. For Kracauer, film should abandon its concentration on human subjectivity (though he does consider this essential for novels and theatre, among other forms), and centre instead on the physical aspects of reality, of which human beings are only a part.

In Kracauer's non-anthropocentric approach, human characters—in contrast to theatre—are not favoured over inanimate objects and can therefore be regarded as "objects among objects."[359] Cinema, he argues, "is not exclusively human. Its subject matter is the infinite flux of visible phenomena—those ever-changing patterns of physical existence whose flow may include human manifestations but need not climax in them."[360] "In using its freedom to bring the inanimate to the fore and make it a carrier of action, film only protests its peculiar requirement to explore all of physical existence, human or nonhuman."[361]

Kracauer does not stand alone with his view that human beings in cinema are not (and should not be) more privileged than non-human objects.[362] For his contemporary Béla Balázs, the whole entity of the world—human beings as well as animate and inanimate objects—expresses itself in film. In Balázs's concept of physiognomy**,** a theory of aesthetic experience through bodily expression, cinema discloses what he terms "the face of things,"[363] in which "the mass, the landscape, gestures and body parts, inert part-objects have a status," as Erica Carter explains, "that

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[358] Ibid., 297–98.
[359] Ibid., 97.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid., 45.
[362] This view is shared by André Bazin: "Man himself is just one fact among others, to whom no pride of place should be given *a priori*." "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38.
[363] Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, 46–51.

equals the significance of the human face."[364] For Balázs, the visual appearance of the object world on screen opens up an experience of the soul of things, which is opposed to the rather conceptual character of written and spoken language.[365] But despite obvious similarities between the two writers regarding cinema's arbitrary treatment of the human and the non-human, Kracauer did not share Balázs's rather romantic view of filmic images as preverbal language, as non-signifying expressions of their objects' inner life. In Kracauer's radically material conception, the corporeality of film (as an extension of photography), though not regarded as soulless, does not show the way to interiority.

In "Remarks on the Actor," the relatively short chapter 6 of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer applies his material aesthetics to the human figure on screen. Starting out from the idea of the human being as "object among objects," Kracauer refers to screen actors as "raw material"[366] and defines them in contrast to stage actors by highlighting the significance of the formers' texture and materiality:

> There is, and there should be, something fragmentary and fortuitous about photographic portraits. Accordingly, the film actor must seem to be his character in such a way that all his expressions, gestures, and poses point beyond themselves to the diffuse contexts out of which they arise. They must breathe a certain casualness marking them as *fragments of an inexhaustible texture*. […] The film actor's performance, then, is true to the medium only if it does not assume the airs of a self-sufficient achievement but impresses us as an incident […] of his character's *material existence*.[367]

Kracauer insists here on the medium's capacity to foreground the physicality of the human character, and hence, to reveal the surface qualities of the human being as 'object among objects.' In this way, the human figure on screen partakes in cinema's experience of physical reality.

In a similar vein, director Christoph Hochhäusler has drawn attention to the experiential benefits that arise from a cinematic approach that treats human beings like objects. In such a cinema, he suggests, the actions of any human character are not explained but rather left obscure:

> [W]as mich im Kino interessiert, ist die Verführung zur Aufmerksamkeit. […] Das Kameraauge verwandelt die vertraute Welt in einen fremden Ort, den man nun, endlich unbeteiligt, in nie erlebter Klarheit sehen kann. Die Kamera ergreift keine

[364] Carter, "Introduction," xxvi.
[365] See for the significance of the soul in film theory Sarah Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[366] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 97.
[367] Ibid., 95.

> Partei; Personen und Dinge werden gleich behandelt, der Mensch wird betrachtet wie ein Tier, ein Haus, eine Wolke: Man will verstehen, lesen, aber man weiß, er wird fremd bleiben und damit eigen. […] Aus Charakteren mit Eigenschaften werden so oft Figuren, die nicht viel mehr als ein Nebel der Latenz sind, eine unscharfe Überlagerung von Möglichkeiten. Darin sehe ich ein realistisches Moment: die opake Oberfläche Mensch ist eine Alltagserfahrung. Wir können nicht wissen, was unser Gegenüber denkt.[368]

As we can see, Hochhäusler's material attitude towards the human being on screen, as deployed in many Berlin School films, is linked in two ways to Kracauer's approach to cinema: the idea of the human being as opaque surface, on the one hand, and the equal treatment of people and things by the camera, on the other. For Hochhäusler, as for Kracauer, the human being is part of the physical world that the camera aspires to capture and, as a result of the medium's technological nature, renders strange. The medium's concern with corporeality, moreover, leads to an encounter with the human character akin to the everyday experience of observing a stranger whom, by watching, we get to know (though only to a certain extent).[369] Yet, Hochhäusler qualifies what we may consider a plea for observational cinema by pointing to possible contradictions:

> Aber natürlich liegt da auch ein Problem. Erzählen setzt ja genau da ein: der Erzähler interpretiert das Vieldeutige. Er erfindet eine Perspektive, eine Sicht der Dinge. Spätestens hier gerät der Traum vom reinen Schauen in Konflikt. Die Erzählung "kontaminiert" das Bild, benutzt und hierarchisiert es. Dieser Konflikt: Erfahrung vs. Erzählung zieht sich durch all unsere Filme und hat zum Beispiel auch Folgen für den Dialog, der selten mehr als Geräusch ist.[370]

While the notion of the human being as opaque surface constitutes a realist element (in the Kracauerian sense) and implies a desire for cinema's 'documentary' qualities, Hochhäusler's second statement suggests a conflict between the camera's apparently objective character and stylistic choices, a tension he describes with the terms "Erfahrung" [experience] and "Erzählung" [narrative]. Hochhäusler points here to the fact that even the most stringently observational cinema relies on formal decisions in relation to, above all, the mise-en-scène, a feature I have discussed in the previous chapter. Hochhäusler's remark can therefore be seen as a further indication of the Berlin School's "reflective realism," which is characterised, as Michael Baute et al. have

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[368] Christoph Hochhäusler in Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, "Mailwechsel," 16–17.

[369] As Thomas Arslan has suggested, "Wie bei realen Personen, gibt es auch bei den Figuren eines Films eine Grenze dessen, was man von ihnen wissen kann." Thomas Arslan in Gabriela Seidel, "Interview mit Thomas Arslan," *Der schöne Tag press kit*, http://www.peripherfilm.de/derschoenetag/dts2.htm#/interview.htm.

[370] Christoph Hochhäusler in Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, "Mailwechsel," 17.

suggested, by "a conscious rendering and modification of theoretically and film historically derived methods."[371] The Berlin School directors' approaches will now be analysed with regard to the human being: how do the films deal with the 'object among objects?'

Creating Ambiguity: Performance in Berlin School Cinema

Every film is a documentary of its actors.
JEAN-LUC GODARD[372]

Before analysing the depiction and characterisation of human characters in Berlin School cinema in more detail, I want to elaborate more generally on some features that are significant for an understanding of the filmmakers' account of the human figure. At this point, I want to stress, once again, that the films associated with the Berlin School are not homogenous but individual works from individual directors. Nevertheless, this study aims to reveal shared beliefs and methods among these distinct approaches, all of which, at least in the view of this author, can be characterised as material-realist.

The Berlin School's leading principle in relation to the 'object among objects' seems to be the rejection of psychological legibility, which is achieved mainly by the reduction of (explanatory) language as well as restraint in the actors' (facial) expressions. In addition, the camerawork supports the films' non-psychological attitude. In this regard, the near avoidance of close-ups, especially of people's faces, is crucial. In fact, even the rare facial close-ups, in interaction and resonance with the predominating minimalist performance mode in Berlin School cinema, do not provide us with access to the characters' inner selves. Instead, the camera regularly maintains a certain distance to the human characters: medium shots prevail. Moreover, the spectator's view of the protagonists is often obstructed when they are captured, as frequently in Berlin School films, from the back or the side. All these characteristics, I suggest, can be seen as essential elements of the Berlin School cinema's portrayals of the human being as opaque stranger.

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[371] Baute et al., "Collage."
[372] Quoted in Perez, *Material Ghost*, 37.

How do these strategies then distinguish themselves from more established methods in mainstream cinema? According to James Naremore, "one job of mainstream acting is to sustain 'the illusion of the unified self,' or what Pudovkin called the 'organic unity of the acted image.'"[373] In *Acting in the Cinema*, Naremore contrasts this most conventional acting technique, which originates from the concepts of Russian theatre director Constantin Stanislavsky and which in American cinema has become known as 'method acting,' (or just *the* Method) with strategies of the *Verfremdungseffekt* [de-familiarisation effect], the interventionist counter-approach of German theatre director and writer Bertolt Brecht. In contrast to Stanislavski's conception, adapted by Lee Strasberg and other American acting coaches, which is aimed at enabling actors to make use of their inner selves in order to give so-called 'truthful' or 'lifelike' performances and, in so doing, create the illusion of 'real' characters, Brecht's methods of estrangement are intended precisely to work against this illusion of reality and, instead, to shape the spectator's awareness of the artificial and illusionary character of the artwork, and hence of the performance as a performance.

While Naremore's study stresses the "old tensions between Stanislavsky and Brecht,"[374] the dichotomy of an ideological battle between naturalism and anti-naturalism, I want to briefly compare these two influential strategies with further approaches to acting. Roughly, we can distinguish between four significant modes of cinematic performance. First, the melodramatic or histrionic acting style, which derives from 19th century theatre, is characterised by the actor's strong and exaggerated gestures and expressions; second, naturalist or verisimilar performances, differently from the highly affect-driven and theatrical acting style, are aimed at creating believable or authentic characters; third, Brechtian counter-strategies to such naturalist realism rely on distanciation techniques that draw attention to the film's staginess in order to disenchant cinema's illusion of reality; fourth, in the minimalist performance mode, an anti-naturalist technique associated with the work of French director Robert Bresson, expressions and gestures are extremely reduced, which hinders psychological insight into the human characters and highlights instead the ambiguity of the actor-characters' physical presence. Whereas naturalistic and, to a lesser degree, melodramatic acting styles continue to prevail in Hollywood and similar mainstream cinemas, numerous

[373] James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 5.
[374] Ibid., 3.

independent filmmakers worldwide have employed performance modes related to the ideas of Brecht or Bresson.

In Berlin School cinema's attitude to the human figure, in addition to the camera's arbitrary treatment of people and objects, performance plays a central role. Yet neither the psychologically driven acting style, often labelled as naturalist and commonly employed in mainstream cinema, nor the Brechtian anti-illusionist distancing strategies used by, among others, Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Jean-Marie Straub/Danièle Huillet, seem to be relevant. Rather, the predominant performance mode employed in Berlin School cinema appears to derive from Robert Bresson's conception of cinematic performance, an approach that has largely been regarded as anti-illusionist (yet different from Brecht's clearly political approach).[375] In fact, alongside Michelangelo Antonioni and filmmakers of the French New Wave's second generation, Bresson is among those who has been mentioned most frequently when it comes to influences on the Berlin School, not only but especially with regard to acting. For instance, Michael Baute et al. have suggested that Berlin School cinema's "tendency of de-familiarising, of thwarting illusions is taken from Robert Bresson."[376]

Being instead of seeming

In the collection of his medium-theoretical reflections, *Notes sur le Cinématographe* (1975), published in English as *Notes on Cinematography* and *Notes on the Cinematographer* (though the more appropriate translation would be *cinematograph*, as it is referred to the formal implications of the medium's technological condition), Bresson formulated the famous and oft-quoted lines: "No actors. (No directing of actors). No parts. (No learning of parts). No staging. But the use of working models, taken from life. BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors)."[377]

In the next paragraph, Bresson points to another difference between his preferred performance mode and conventional acting, which is related to questions of exteriority and interiority: "HUMAN MODELS: Movement from the exterior to the interior. (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)"[378] In Bresson's deeply

[375] See for naturalist and anti-naturalist acting style traditions also, Andrew Higson, "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," *Screen* 27, no. 3–4 (1986): 110–33.
[376] Baute et al., "Collage."
[377] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 1.
[378] Ibid., 2.

material and anti-psychological conception, the cinematic portrayal of human beings is not aimed at conveying an understanding of the characters' inner selves or producing identification with them; what matters instead is the actor's obscure physicality, which may eventually reveal some inner movements. Thus, even though Bresson's account of the human being relies heavily on the body, it is a body withheld from strong and obvious expressions. In Bresson's words, "Unusual approach to bodies. On the watch for the most imperceptible, the most inward movements." [379] In accordance with the director's overall minimalist approach, all corporeal movements need to be restrained; hence, in his films, gestures and (facial) expressions are consistently downplayed. This also applies to the voice, which can be described as continuously flat and monotonous. What Bresson demands from his 'human models,' who are required to follow clear instructions (improvisation is not desired, not even permitted), can therefore be described as a refusal of acting: "It is not a matter of acting 'simple' or of acting 'inward' but of not acting at all." [380] Rather than playing a fictional character—imitating or simulating—screen performance is rooted in the actor's physical yet controlled presence.

Bresson's reflections proceed from the assumption that film's peculiarity arises from its technological nature. It is therefore the cinematograph (especially but not only the film camera) that divides cinema from other art forms and has implications for the use of the medium, including, above all, cinematography and performance. As critic Frieda Grafe elaborated in her lucid observations on Bresson's work,

> Der Kinematograph kann spontane Regungen registrieren. Seine größten Möglichkeiten liegen in seiner Begrenztheit. Um Intuitives sich darstellen zu lassen, stehen ihm nur äußere Mittel zur Verfügung. Aber der Körper in der Kunst hat durch ihn eine andere, direktere Funktion bekommen. Nicht Gedankenvermittler. *Sein bloßes Dasein wird der Gegenstand*.[381]

This approach to the human figure contrasts strongly with mainstream cinema's reliance on plot and psychology, as Grafe further points out, "Das auf Erzählung fixierte Kino verlässt sich auf Psychologie. Vorgedachtes wiederholend. Alles Innere wird veräußerlicht in standardisierten Formen."[382]

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[379] Ibid., 19.
[380] Ibid., 49.
[381] Frieda Grafe, "Asketenexzesse: Robert Bresson und seine Filme," in Frieda Grafe, *In Großaufnahme: Autorenpolitik und jenseits*, ed. Enno Patalas (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 2005), 42 (emphasis added).
[382] Ibid.

As we can see, Bresson's notion of acting as non-acting shares similarities with Kracauer's remarks on the actor. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer even uses the same terms to describe the human being on screen, suggesting that "the film actor must act as if he did not act at all but were a real-life person caught in the act by the camera. He must seem to *be* his character. He is in a sense a photographer's *model*."[383] This emphasis on the actor-character's material existence, demanded by Kracauer and employed by Bresson and his 'successors' (including, among others, and in different degrees, Berlin School directors), distinguishes itself from the predominant naturalist acting style, which, as discussed above, aims to achieve verisimilitude by presenting the character's unity and coherence. The human figure in Kracauer's conception of cinema and, as I hope to demonstrate, in Berlin School films, on the other hand, is instead presented as rather opaque. This results from a cinematic strategy that creates ambiguity by primarily highlighting the human characters' physicality rather than giving explanations for their actions or allowing psychological insights.

Kracauer's remarks on the actor, Hochhäusler's notion of the human character as opaque surface and Bresson's concept of the human model, then, serve as the starting point for my exploration of Berlin School cinema's account of the human being. I proceed from the assumption that the films discussed in this study gravitate towards what has been described as observational cinema, which is supported by the reduction of both explanatory speech and full views of the protagonists' faces, as well as the restraint of strong emotions and bodily, particularly facial, expressions. Low-key acting appears to be an essential part of Berlin School cinema, analogous to the minimalist character of other techniques and devices such as cinematography, editing, lighting and sound, as described in the previous chapter. Berlin School directors, as French film critic Pierre Gras has noted, "verlangen von ihren Darstellern eher neutrals Spiel. Das sieht man sofort, wenn man die Schauspielerregie dieser Filmemacher vergleicht mit dem Spiel von Birol Ünel bei Fatih Akin, Daniel Brühl bei Becker, Sebastian Koch bei Henckel von Donnersmarck oder Axel Prahl bei Dresen."[384]

The films discussed in this study favour a performance mode that, I suggest, might be termed 'inexpressive expressiveness.' It is inexpressive only insofar as

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[383] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 94–95 (first emphasis in original, second emphasis added).
[384] Pierre Gras, *Good Bye, Fassbinder! - Der deutsche Kinofilm seit 1990*, trans. Marcus Seibert (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2014), 148.

traditional forms of expression such as speech, facial expression or meaningful gestures are reduced to a minimum, which, in turn, leaves room for a different kind of expressiveness rooted in the human characters' sheer physical existence, their discreet body language, little movements and looks. By clinging to the surface of things, which means here the actor-characters' bodies, they refuse, or at least complicate, an easy, that is psychologically motivated, identification with the human being on screen. As Christian Petzold has explained in a discussion of his film *Gespenster*,

> The "cinema of identification" gets on my nerves, so I made a film that was not about identification, or, in any case, a film in which the degree of identification is lower than usual. I wanted to see the world, not merely the subject (through whom one is invited to see the world in the traditional "cinema of identification").[385]

In accordance with the Berlin School filmmakers' overall material-realist approach, the human figures, the 'objects among objects,' are presented as opaque strangers we are allowed to observe.

Bressonian Figures: Sophie, Deniz, Nina

Before illustrating the depiction and characterisation of human characters in Berlin School cinema by looking at two films by directors of the movement's 'second generation'—Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* and Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow*—, I want to reflect on this chapter's subject matter further by considering the films and filmmakers we already know from the discussion in the previous chapter: *Marseille* by Angela Schanelec, *Der schöne Tag* by Thomas Arslan and *Gespenster* by Christian Petzold. The three films have in common that they are centred (albeit in different degrees) upon female protagonists—Sophie (*Marseille*), Deniz (*Der schöne Tag*) and Nina (Gespenster)—, all of whom, I want to suggest, can be regarded as Bressonian figures.

The Bressonian influence on this group of filmmakers seems to hold especially true for Thomas Arslan and Angela Schanelec, who on various occasions have expressed their reverence for Bresson. The fact that Arslan's production company *Pickpocket* is named after Bresson's eponymous film can be seen as a further indication of the significant impact of the French director. But more importantly, what we may call

[385] Christian Petzold in Abel, "Cinema of Identification."

Bresson's role model function is clearly noticeable in the formal restraint of Arslan's and Schanelec's films, as well as in the directors' anti-psychological attitude to the human figure and their preferred minimalist performance mode. In Petzold's cinema, too, we can detect an unmistakably material stance, which strives to work against the psychologisation of human characters and highlights instead their obscure physicality, a detail that plays a crucial part in the director's aim of creating a state of abeyance (see chapter 3). Yet differently from his fellow directors, and in particular from Schanelec, Petzold finds his role models for this foregrounding of physicality, not only in (modern) European cinema but also in (classical and New) Hollywood films. For Petzold, the physicality of American (genre) cinema stands in stark contrast to the heavy reliance on dialogue in German post-war cinema.[386]

In the following examination of Berlin School films' portrayals of human characters as opaque strangers, three aspects seem to be of particular importance. First, the cinematography/mise-en-scène: how are the human figures framed and displayed? Second, the exposition of the protagonists: how are they introduced in the beginning, and how do we get to know them throughout the films? And third, the acting style: how do the actors' minimalist performances support the experience of opacity?

The surface of things

Let us start the investigation of what I propose to call Berlin School's Bressonian figures by looking more closely at the portrayal of Sophie, the female protagonist of *Marseille*. Schanelec's film does not give us much background information, apart from the fact that Sophie is a photographer from Berlin who exchanges flats with Zelda, a girl from the eponymous city. It is neither explained why she came to the Marseille, nor are we provided with any knowledge about the circumstances of her life in Berlin. In the first third of the film, there is hardly any plot, at least no dramatic composition, but almost

[386] Petzold has drawn attention, moreover, to (Hollywood) cinema's capacity to render visible new ways of dealing with the human body. For Petzold, the actor-character's body as an expression of the contemporary condition can be observed, for instance, in *Pretty Woman*: "This is American cinema, which has a certain physicality […]. And that is for me also genre. That they do not just rummage through material but really discover something new in it. And what recurs all the time in these genre films is how men look at that particular historical moment. In *Pretty Woman*, Richard Gere is a neoliberal ass, he destroys companies or whatever, but he represents a new kind of body. Neoliberalism brings out a new kind of masculine body. That comes right out of Scott F. Fitzgerald, runs from the southern states directly to Richard Gere—and the German audience see that and realize that they are seeing something new on the screen. I always realized that and thought, This is sexy, and this is dangerous." Christian Petzold in Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 156.

'pure' observation of a stranger, a human being we do not know much about. The camera accompanies her, alternating between shots from greater and lesser distances, both static and hand-held, which, in combination with the film's adherence to ambient sound, creates a quasi-documentary effect. Sophie is primarily depicted exploring her new environment, and we experience this encounter by watching her. In some shots, we see her simply walking through the streets or taking pictures. Or we observe her during other quite ordinary events: sitting on the bus, drinking coffee outside a bar, shopping, putting on her new shoes in the apartment etc.: fragments of her rather solitary days in the French city. Since we are left unclear about Sophie's intentions and motivations, we have no other choice than to watch her and make assumptions about her state of mind. In this way, *Marseille* provides us with an experience of the protagonist that can be seen as diametrically opposed to the primary function of the human figure in classical Hollywood cinema as described by David Bordwell:

> The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or eternal circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character […].[387]

In stark contrast to such goal-orientated films, Schanelec's cinema is barely concerned with character development, and *Marseille* does not offer any more than what director Dominik Graf has called "die Andeutung einer Biographie." [388] Instead of psychological explanations, the film introduces the protagonist mainly by her corporeal movements and the material texture of her body. As Schanelec has explained,

> Den Begriff der Veränderung oder Entwicklung finde ich extrem kompliziert. [...] Ich kann nicht Szenen schreiben nur damit sich die Figur entwickelt. Ich frage mich eher, wie bewegt sie sich, oder wie ist jemand? In einer Reihe von Szenen geht die Figur zum Beispiel nur. Ich versuche solche *äußerlichen Dinge* zu finden, um dabei selber etwas zu sehen.[389]

It is this concentration on external characteristics that is the core of Schanelec's phenomenological approach to human characters. The way Sophie moves through the city, with curiosity but also deliberately and carefully, may give us an idea about her.

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[387] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 157.
[388] Dominik Graf in Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, "Mailwechsel," 38.
[389] Angela Schanelec in Christoph Hochhäusler and Nicolas Wackerbarth, "Interview: Angela Schanelec, Reinhold Vorschneider," *Revolver*, no. 13 (2005): 29 (emphasis added).

However, her movement does not give us any psychological insights, but rather an open set of significations. Differently from classical cinematic approaches, which explain and depict 'psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals' in such a way that the spectator can identify with them, Schanelec's film clings to the surface of things and presents the human character as an opaque stranger that we get to know (though only to a certain extent) by watching her.

Showing / Not showing

Schanelec's *Marseille*, as already noted in the previous chapter, starts *in medias res*, without any substantial exposition of both characters and setting. Thrown into the reality of the film, we are therefore forced to observe and make sense of what we are seeing and hearing, which in the opening scene are back views of two (unknown) women in a car, driving through a (unidentified) city, while sounds from inside and outside the car reach our ear. From the very beginning, due to the lack of background information as well as the extensive length of the takes, we are thus placed as observers. Yet, this observation is of rather ambivalent character, since the two female characters are at least as much obstructed as they are exposed. This results from the mise-en-scène, particularly the camera position (located closely behind the characters) and the extreme low-key lighting inside the car. On the one hand, we are thus allowed and even forced to watch the human beings on screen, while Schanelec's film, on the other hand, consistently sets restrictions on this observation. The film's twofold attitude to observation can be seen as part of the director's material-realist approach to both the human figure and narration. As Schanelec has suggested,

> Die klassische Dramaturgie hat mit dem Leben überhaupt nichts zu tun: Dass die Erzählweise nicht von den Personen aus zu sehen ist, sondern von den Zuschauern. Oder davon, wie man glaubt, den Zuschauer zu bewegen. Mich interessiert es eher, wie sich die Personen bewegen, wie Dinge aufeinander folgen, wie unerwartet auch und wie wenig absehbar und wie sich Geschichten wenden. Das ist ja so unabsehbar im Leben, und ich finde es schön, wenn es im Film auch so ist.[390]

Wenke Wegner has elaborated on Schanelec's particular approach to the human characters' bodies by taking the example of Mimmi, the female protagonist of *Plätze in Städten* (*Places in Cities*, 1998), a film that, as Wegner suggests, "schwankt zwischen

[390] Angela Schanelec in Antonia Ganz, "Interview: Angela Schanelec," *Revolver* 5 (2001).

einem Verdecken, das von Schanelec selbst auch als 'Schützen' beschrieben wurde, und einem Entblößen der Körper auf visueller und akustischer Ebene."[391] As Wegner further explains,

> Im Film dominieren Bilder, die eher verdecken statt entblößen. Das Verdecken der Körper ist bei Schanelec ein sichtbares Verdecken, bei dem die uneingeschränkte Sicht auf Körper mit den Mitteln des Films einerseits möglich gemacht, aber gleichzeitig behindert wird. […] All diese eingeschränkten Blicke auf Körper legen nahe, dass Schanelec diese mit einem anderen Anliegen zeigen möchte als das klassische Kino. Die Bilder dieses Kinos bilden aber für Schanelec einen negativen Referenzhorizont, vor dem ihre eigenen Bilder wirken und vor dem sich das Eigentümliche von Schanelecs Umgang mit Körpern am besten beschreiben lässt.[392]

Rather than providing us with knowledge, our encounters with protagonists like Mimmi in *Plätze in Städten* or Sophie in *Marseille* are primarily experiences of and through bodies. The opening scene of *Marseille*, despite, or rather because of the obstructed views, creates curiosity about the two women (one of whom will eventually become the film's protagonist) and may direct our gaze, aside from the much brighter urban environment (behind the front window), to their obscure and fragmented facial segments. In this way, Schanelec's film draws attention to the material texture of bodies, or rather, parts of them: the women's hairs, the shape of ears, neck and nose (as well as Zelda's eyes and forehead in the rear mirror), thus creating what can be called, with reference to recent phenomenological film theory, a haptic experience. "Although cinema is an audiovisual medium," Laura U. Marks has pointed out," synaesthesia, as well as haptic visuality enables the viewer to experience cinema as multisensory."[393] By foregrounding the haptic quality of the human figures' body parts, Schanelec's cinema, moreover, partakes in what may be considered a process of democratisation of the senses (beyond the predominance of vision): the whole body becomes significant.

The significance of the *Rückenfigur*

In Berlin School cinema's anti-psychological account of the human being, we can particularly observe a preference for shots that either display the human being in its

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[391] Wenke Wegner, "Hinsehen, Hinhören: Körper und Angela Schanelecs Plätze in Städten," *Nach dem Film* 10 (2008).
[392] Ibid.
[393] Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 22–23. Notwithstanding his emphasis on the somatic nature of film spectatorship (described in chapter 1 and 3), Kracauer was concerned mainly with the medium's (audio)visual qualities.

entirety or linger on usually less well represented body parts such as the neck, shoulders, ears, etc.: body parts which, unlike the face, are much less open to be interpreted or read, but demand rather to be sensually experienced. In this regard, not only the very occasional use of close-ups in Berlin School cinema is noteworthy, but also the recurrent refusal to position the protagonist's face in full view. The strategy of showing human characters from behind can be considered a counter-approach to frontality, one of the main principles, alongside centrality and balance, on which, according to David Bordwell, the image composition of classical Hollywood cinema relies:

> Both centering and balancing function as narration in that these film techniques shape the story action for the spectator. The narrational qualities of shot composition are also evident in the classical use of frontality. Renaissance painting derived many principles of scenography from Greek and Roman theater, so that the idea of a narrative action addressed to the spectator became explicit in Western painting. The classical film image relies upon such a conception of centrality. The face is positioned in full, three-quarter or profile view; the body typically in full or threequarter view. The result is an odd rubbernecking characteristic of Hollywood character position; people's heads may face one another in profile but their bodies do not.[394]

The human being (deliberately) displayed from behind has been termed a *Rückenfigur*, usually translated into English as 'rear-view figure,' which, like the principle of frontality, draws on a tradition in Western painting, most prominently employed by Dutch painters of the 17th century and in Caspar David Friedrich's landscape pictures, before being adopted for the cinema screen. In feature films, the use and function of the rear-view figure, as film scholar Guido Kirsten has suggested, varies between (rather) classical, modernist and realist approaches: "Im klassischen Film heben sie sich von der Norm (semi-)frontal gestalteter Einstellungen ab und haben meistens einen recht eindeutig bestimmbaren Sinn; im filmischen Modernismus können sie selbst zu einem Struktur- und Stilmittel werden; in der realistischen Ästhetik schließlich konnotieren sie eine 'alltäglichere' Sicht auf die Welt."[395] Following Kirsten's categorisation (which, as he suggests, should be understood not as absolute but heuristic), it seems more than obvious to classify the recurrent employment of the rear-view figure in Berlin School cinema as realist, since the obstructed view onto objects (including the human being),

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[394] David Bordwell, "The Classical Hollywood Style, 1917-1960," in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, ed. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (London: Routledge, 1988), 51–52.

[395] Guido Kirsten, "Zur Rückenfigur im Spielfilm," *Montage AV* 20, no. 2 (2011): 121.

analogously to the question of the human characters' opacity in general, can be seen as a more accurate representation of the world, one that is closer to our everyday experience.

Regardless of the realistic quality of the mise-en-scène, we need to understand Berlin School cinema's recurrent employment of back views of human characters as a deliberate stylistic choice, a cinematic technique which, moreover, can be used in such a way that it draws attention to what is absent yet commonly present: the human face. This can be observed, for instance, in the opening scene of Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie*, which in Kirsten's article exemplifies the modernist function of the rear-view figure. Yet, without denying the influence of Godard's self-reflective counter-strategies to Hollywood cinema on the Berlin School directors, obstructed sights of the human face in *Marseille* do *not* have the purpose of creating awareness of the mise-en-scène and the constructedness of filmic images in general. Rather, Schanelec's and her fellow directors' work appears to be mainly concerned with establishing an experience of the material world—including the human being—, which is different from the psychologically driven representations in conventional cinema.

Working against oversignification

In Berlin School films, in stark contrast to the priority to the human face in mainstream cinema, we can thus observe a preference for shots taken from a greater distance (medium shots in particular), as well as points of view that block, or at least partly block, our sight of the human face. Rather, they highlight the human figures' corporeal movements or explore body parts that carry a much greater degree of ambiguity than the human face. In this regard, it is important to stress the complete avoidance of shot/reverse-shots in Schanelec's cinema, a conventional technique that, according to Harun Farocki, can be regarded as "der wichtigste Ausdruck im Wertgesetz Film."[396] With their inherent concentration on the human figure, and the face in particular, shot-reverse-shots thus stand exemplarily for the vast majority of contemporary films, which, as Murray Smith has suggested, render decipherable facial expressions:

> Take a look at any mainstream feature film—and a great many other films as well—and it will be obvious that the visual landscape of these films is dominated

[396] Harun Farocki, "Schuß-Gegenschuß: Der wichtigste Ausdruck im Wertgesetz Film," *Montage AV* 20, no. 1 (2011): 153–65.

> by shots in which facial expression is legible (note that this does not mean simply close-ups), while their corresponding soundtracks resonate with the cadences and intonation of emotionally expressive human voices.[397]

We thus need to understand Berlin School cinema's reluctance to provide us with depictions of human faces as a response to this conventional technique, and as related to strong suspicions among the filmmakers that facial expressions expose emotions in an overly unmistakable manner, thus apparently allowing direct access to the human character's psyche. As Christian Petzold has suggested,

> Dieses Abwenden, nicht nur, um was Geheimes zu machen, sondern um die Schönheit körperlicher, physischer Präsenz zu erfahren und nicht immer nur die Gesichter und immer nur die klaren Gesten und immer nur die alltägliche Grammatik zu haben, sondern wie jemand reitet, wie jemand ins Auto einsteigt, wie jemand geht, diese Form von Physis, die interessiert mich bei den Darstellern, und eben nicht immer nur das Gesicht.[398]

For Petzold, whose remark about the experience of physical presence shares similarities with Schanelec's idea of quotidian beauty (see chapter 3), the counter-strategy of turning away from the human face contributes to a more all-encompassing but also ambiguous approach to the human body, a practice that aims to break away from the strong legibility of gestures and facial expressions in mainstream cinema. It is therefore no coincidence that the motif of the *Rückenfigur* has played a significant role in the work of Petzold's favourite painter, Gerhard Richter, most prominently perhaps in the latter's portrayal of his daughter, *Betty* (Fig. 12).

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[397] Murray Smith, "Darwin and the Directors: Film, Emotion, and the Face in the Age of Evolution," in *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*, ed. Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, and Jonathan Gottschall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 260.

[398] Christian Petzold in von Reden and Wulf, "Interview mit Christian Petzold." As Petzold further explains, "An der Filmakademie habe ich mich ein bisschen nach dem Satz gerichtet, den Harun Farocki mal in der Filmkritik geschrieben hat, dass die deutschen Schauspieler nicht zum Method Acting nach New York fahren sollten in den Theaterferien, sondern in die Schweiz, um sich dort die Gesichtsmuskeln durchschneiden zu lassen, da habe ich gedacht so, das fehlt irgendwie. Hier war immer so viel Gesichtsausdruck, Augenbrauenspiel, die Sprache war immer theatralisch. Ich kann mich noch erinnern, das waren ja immer Theaterschauspieler beim 'Derrick' oder so. Meine Eltern fanden das immer ganz toll, wenn ein Schauspieler so eine ganz tiefe Theaterstimme hat, der hatte auch lange genug studiert. Und ich habe immer so eine Sehnsucht nach den Figuren gehabt, die nicht Theater sind, sondern die mit ihrer Umgebung etwas anfangen können, die genauso wahr sind wie ein Glas Wasser, die ein Fenster aufmachen können oder ins Auto einsteigen." Ibid. Petzold's statement, as Eric Rentschler has observed, shares similarities with Michael Klier's audiovisual essay Schauspielerei (Gesten und Gesichter) (1982), a critical evaluation of the predominant theatrical acting style in New German cinema (in distinction from the understated physicality of performances in American cinema). See Eric Rentschler, "An Archaeology of the Berlin School," in *The Use and Abuse of Cinema: German Legacies from the Weimar Era to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 294.

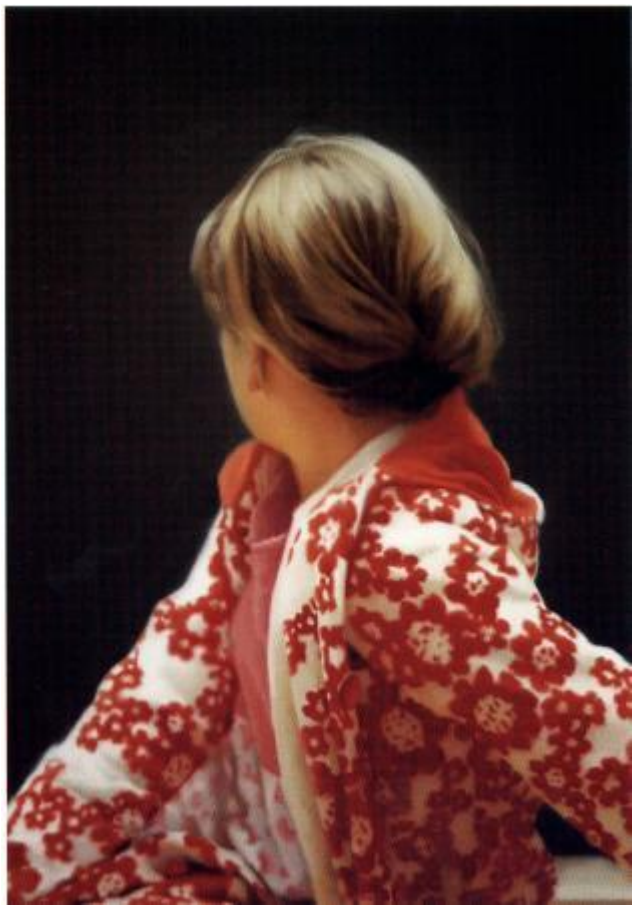

FIGURE 12: GERHARD RICHTER'S BETTY[399]

Petzold has referred, moreover, to observations on a Griffith film in Béla Balázs's *Der sichtbare Mensch*:

> Eine Frau bekommt die Nachricht, dass ihr Sohn ertrunken ist. Griffith zeigt ihre Reaktion nicht im Gesicht, obwohl die Darstellerin, Lillian Gish, ein Star war und jeder sie sehen wollte. Sie drehte sich stattdessen um und ging weg. Es gab noch kein Travelling, die Kamera konnte ihr nicht folgen und ließ sie einfach weggehen. Bálazs ist begeistert von der Rückenansicht von Lillian Gish, weil, so sagt er, in diesem Moment das Kino anfängt. Denn der Zuschauer fängt zu projizieren an. Das habe ich den Schauspielern bei den Proben erklärt. Ich möchte nicht eindringen in die Psyche der Figuren, sondern ihnen folgen.[400]

In his own work, Petzold has continually made use of the rear-view figure. In *Gespenster*, the human characters are repeatedly displayed from behind or the side, hence our sight of their faces is at least partially obstructed. For instance, the film's first image we get of Nina, one of the film's three female main characters, is already a back view; a long distance shot that shows her in the background beneath the huge trees of the Tiergarten. The scene continues like this for around fifteen seconds, which not only

[399] © Gerhard Richter 2021 (14042021). Courtesy of Atelier Richter.
[400] von Reden and Wulf, "Interview mit Christian Petzold."

draws attention, by means of the amplified sound of the wind in the trees, to the spatial environment but also evokes curiosity about the human figure. When the film then cuts to a medium close-up of Nina, the front part of her body is still turned away (Fig. 13). The camera now lingers on the girl's back and shoulders, neck and hair, while she collects rubbish. It takes another ten seconds before, provoked by a shout, Nina eventually turns toward the camera, so that we see her face for the first time (though only for a brief moment). The film introduces the protagonist by her rather ambiguous corporeal movement rather than by speech or unequivocal (facial) expression, and in so doing, creates what Petzold has referred to above as the experience of physical presence.

A similar employment of the rear-view figure can be observed in the final sequence of *Gespenster*. Following a breakfast with Françoise, which ends with another puncturing of Nina's illusory longing for love and belonging, Nina leaves the hotel and strolls around. Instead of providing us with a view of her face, the camera follows her closely from behind, displaying, similarly to the scene described above, her shoulder, neck and hair. Thus, the girl's state of mind is rendered sensible by her corporeal movement, which seems slouchier than before, as well as by little gestures like scratching her fingers over the wall of a building, an action which is also made clearly audible. (As already observed, the experience of physical reality in Berlin School films takes place just as much on the aural as on the visual level.) Besides the sound of the scratching, we can distinctly hear Nina's footsteps on the pavement during the walk, which contributes to the experience of her corporeal movement. Moments later, Nina re-enters the Tiergarten, where she finds Françoise's wallet with the computer-generated images of her daughter, but despite the uncanny likeness, she throws them away. In a few shots of this scene the protagonist is angled towards the camera, yet she is either filmed from a larger distance or her face is partly obstructed, thus they do not allow an unequivocal legibility of her inner self. Nina then turns away from the camera and walks into the park. The camera follows her for a few seconds before becoming static, while the heroine continues drifting into the Tiergarten: an open ending (Fig. 14).

FIGURE 13 / 14: WORKING AGAINST OVERSIGNIFICATION

All these features create a high degree of ambiguity with respect to the protagonist's state of mind, and can be seen as illustrations of Berlin School cinema's anti-psychological approach to the human figure. Films like Petzold's *Gespenster* (the same holds true for Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*) open up new, material perspectives on the human being on screen, challenging the oversignification of cinematic representations.

New ways of seeing

Let us now look at a further scene from Schanelec's *Marseille*, not only in order to underpin my argument about Berlin School cinema's material-realist attitude to the human figure but also to demonstrate how even depictions of the face can still provide

us with novel ways of seeing. Around twenty-five minutes into the film, we become more acquainted with the protagonist by witnessing one of those intimate moments which, according to critic Birgit Glombitza, are often found in Schanelec's films: "Wenn man Zaungast ungewohnt intimer Momente wurde, in denen sich die Protagonisten aus ihrer Reserve haben locken lassen. Beim Tanzen etwa im Schwimmbad (*Plätze in Städten*) oder in einer verwaisten Provinzdisko (*Mein langsames Leben*)." [401] In *Marseille*, this moment of familiarity takes place inside a bar: a static long shot that displays Sophie's encounter with Pierre, an auto mechanic who has lend her his car for a day trip to the surroundings of Marseille. Over a glass of whiskey, they start to chat and also gently flirt. For the first time since her arrival, Sophie seems to feel comfortable and relaxed (a state of mind which might be traced to the alcohol but perhaps even more to the company in which she finds herself), so that she even gives away some personal details: "when I start drinking, I can't stop drinking. It's like when I'm sleeping, I can't stop sleeping. I never know when to stop."[402] However, it is not so much the content of this conversation which reveals something about Sophie; rather, it is the experience of close observation as such, the fact that we are allowed to inspect the protagonist throughout the duration of her chat with Pierre.

Long takes and static shots prevail throughout the entire film, but this first of two takes in the bar sequence, which lasts more than eight minutes, is by far the longest. Positioned at eye level, the camera allows a close observation of the two human figures but also keeps sufficient distance (medium shot). This helps maintain ambiguity with regard to the female protagonist's inner self (a feature which also holds true for similar scenes in others of Schanelec's films, as mentioned by Glombitza above). Moreover, as a result of the mise-en-scène, which displays Pierre angled towards the camera while Sophie is mainly shown in profile (sometimes we see even less), our view of the protagonist, and her face in particular, is again slightly obstructed (Fig. 15).

Schanelec's recurrent strategy of obstructing views of characters' faces, which can be considered a counter-approach to representations of the human being on screen, becomes even more evident when a friend of Pierre's enters the bar and interrupts their flirtatious conversation with a cheeky, throwaway comment. Sophie turns towards him,

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[401] Birgit Glombitza, "Dem Leben abgeschaut: Die wunderbaren Bilder der Berliner Regisseurin Angela Schanelec und ihr neuer Film 'Marseille,'" *Die Zeit*, September 23, 2004, http://www.zeit.de/2004/40/Angela_Schanelec.

[402] The dialogue is in French (English translation from the DVD subtitles).

away from the camera, but Schanelec—or Bettina Böhler, Schanelec's and several other Berlin School directors' long-term editor—refuses the conventional cut here to a shot that would allow a (full) view of Sophie's face. In this decisive moment of filmic 'action,' we are thus provided with a back view of the protagonist rather than seeing her immediate facial reaction (Fig. 16). When the film, after another minute, eventually allows the view of Sophie's face, it comes as rather unexpected. Yet, this is also not a conventional close-up but a noticeably precise (and staged) frame, in which Sophie is positioned on the left, with Pierre on the outer right of the image and his friend, in the background and slightly out of focus, between them (Fig. 17). The abrupt cut after almost nine minutes has a strong surprise effect. Unexpected as the sudden change of perspective is, we are initially left disorientated before adjusting our vision and other senses. In this state of momentary perplexity, the image of Sophie's face may affect us even more strongly, thus appearing in its suggestive indeterminacy.

FIGURE 15 / 16 / 17: NEW WAYS OF SEEING

This bar scene illustrates Schanelec's poetic and unorthodox treatment of cinematography and montage, an approach that favours reaction over action. Rather than shots being chosen for the sake of the story or character development, Schanelec's cinema presents us novel, less clichéd, views of human beings, and the object world in general, enabling different ways of seeing. Despite a general reluctance with regard to (facial) close-ups, Schanelec does intersperse them once in a while, and she does this mostly, such as in the bar scene described above, when we would not expect it. Very different from the conventional practice, Schanelec's use of the close-up, in line with her overall approach, promotes (unmotivated) experiences of material phenomena, provoking curiosity rather than allowing identification with the human character.[403]

"The close-up," as Mary Ann Doane has suggested with reference to Jacques Aumont (whose reflections on the face in cinema, in turn, draw very much on Béla Balázs's conception of this subject matter), "transforms whatever it films into a quasi-tangible thing, producing an intense phenomenological experience of presence, and yet, simultaneously, that deeply experienced entity becomes a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read. This is, inside or outside of the cinema, the inevitable operation of the face as well."[404] Yet despite this apparently irrefutable character of both the close-up and the face, as described by Doane, Schanelec's particular approach works against the legibility of facial expressions. In Schanelec's cinema, the (display of the) face regains a certain autonomy and therefore novelty, a practice which distinguishes itself fundamentally from its signifying function in mainstream cinema. Once liberated essentially from motivation and (over)signification, we can watch Sophie's face with even more curiosity and inspect it for the most indiscernible movements. Established in such a way, the facial close-up re-gains the revealing and ambiguous quality (beyond signification) that writers like Kracauer, Benjamin and Balázs have attributed to this type of shot (see chapter 1).

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[403] As Kracauer has discussed D. W. Griffith's use of the close-up, "Annie's face is also an end it itself. And so is the image of Mae Marsh's hands. No doubt it is to impress upon us her inner condition, but besides making us experience what we would in a measure have experienced anyway because of our familiarity with the characters involved, this close-up contributes something momentous and unique." Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 47.

[404] Mary Ann Doane, "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in Cinema," *differences* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 94.

Restrained expressions

As we can see, the establishment of this particular experience of reality is crucially dependent upon restraint. This holds true not only for Schanelec's cinema but also for the films of her fellow directors, Thomas Arslan and Christian Petzold, as Michael Baute et al. have suggested:

> One must lie in wait for the real reality which is visible only in the inner movements of things. The cinema is the apparatus with which one can track down these inner movements of things and people (who are just a special instance of things with a life of their own). The cinema is the machine of the phenomenological opening towards the world but this is only possible if it restrains itself to the greatest extent.[405]

The Berlin School filmmakers' work against intelligibility relies mainly, aside from their particular approach to the mise-en-scène, on the actors' minimalist performance modes. As elaborated in the introduction to this chapter, Bresson's approach to acting, which has been understood as either material or metaphysical, has had an enormous impact on various Berlin School directors. In Bresson's view, it is precisely the expressionlessness of the actor-model that reveals the human being's inner nature, thus "recovering the automatisms of real life;"[406] and revealing material surface as the embodiment of inner realities. Bresson's demand for restrained expressions, as Andrew Higson explains in his essay "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," applies to the whole human body: the face, gestures, movements as well as the voice.[407] As Jacques Rancière has observed on the restrained expressions of Mouchette, the heroine of Bresson's eponymous film: "Not only her words are resistant, but her 'attention' itself, her way of absorbing the other's words without her face letting us know what she makes of them. At this point the mechanical evenness of the vocal automaton encounters the much more complex logic of a face automaton."[408]

Such reduction of facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal expressions can also be found in the performances of the female protagonists in Schanelec's *Marseille*, Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* and Petzold's *Gespenster*. Yet despite the shared similarities between the filmmakers' approaches to the human being on screen, one can also observe what

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[405] Baute et al., "Collage."
[406] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 38.
[407] See Andrew Higson, "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," *Screen* 27, no. 3–4 (1986): 110–33.
[408] Jacques Rancière, "Mouchette and the Paradoxes of the Language of Images," in *The Intervals of Cinema*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), 59.

might be called different degrees of opacity. Notwithstanding the overall tendency to expressionlessness, the low-key acting of Maren Eggert (Sophie) in Schanelec's *Marseille* and Julia Hummer (Nina) in Petzold's *Gespenster* differ slightly from the even blanker performance of Serpil Turhan (Deniz) in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*.

Marseille presents Sophie as an opaque stranger, a particular experience to which Maren Eggert's low-key acting contributes significantly. Consider, for instance, the almost dialogue-free first thirty minutes of *Marseille*, where the camera lingers on the protagonist's body, observing her strolling around and exploring the new environment. Despite the fact that the first half of the film is very much centred on the protagonist (which is a marked contrast to her almost total disappearance from the subsequent Berlin section of the film), Eggert's subtle performance gives us hardly any indications about the character's state of mind. This is especially true with regard to facial expressions. The protagonist's inner feelings in *Marseille* are not expressed outwardly, and her facial expressions are practically blank. It is precisely the general absence of unambiguous facial expressions that make us perceive the little movements—a blink of the eye, a twist of the mouth—and subtle modifications in the protagonist's face.

This can be observed in a further close-up of Sophie's face, taken during a chat with a neighbour just after her return to Berlin. Schanelec's composition of the shot differs in significant ways from prevailing practices in classical cinema; neither is the space established for us (which leads to a certain disorientation), nor is the protagonist's face brightly illuminated (a result of the director's proscription of artificial lighting, and a further evidence for the cinematographer's strategy of producing 'Raumlicht' rather than 'Personenlicht' described in the previous chapter). Unlike in a conventional shot/reverse-shot sequence, Schanelec films this brief conversation without cutting, which allows us to examine the protagonist's face, placed against an ochre wall—an 'imprisoning frame'—, for about thirty seconds. However, since Sophie, or more precisely, Maren Eggert as Sophie, shows almost no facial expressions (Fig. 18), apart from a very subtle smile at the end (Fig. 19), her face (and therefore her inner self) remains opaque and difficult to decipher (even if, in accordance with Doane's statement above, we nevertheless try). We could therefore say that Schanelec's film reveals the protagonist's face as 'an intense phenomenological experience of presence,' downplaying its signifying quality as 'a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read.'

FIGURE 18 / 19: RESTRAINED EXPRESSIONS (SOPHIE)

Marseille creates an experience of and through the protagonist's body, but the actor does not function as active producer of emotions. Rather, Eggert's restrained and therefore rather ambiguous bodily expressions support the establishment of the character's opaque personality. As Schanelec has explained with regard to her approach to emotions in cinema: "Ich glaube nicht daran, dass beim Zuschauer Emotionen erzeugt werden, indem man die Schauspieler nötigt, sich zu exaltieren. Man weiß ja immer, dass sie nur spielen, und es ist schwer, einen Funken Wahrheit darin zu finden. Das Erzeugen von Gefühlen im Film ist komplizierter, es hängt für mich mehr mit der Form des Films zusammen."[409]

[409] Angela Schanelec in Ganz, "Interview: Schanelec."

For Schanelec, 'truthful' emotions cannot be produced by the actor's outward expressions, which she associates very much with theatre performance, a belief that shares similarities with Bresson's approach to acting. As Schanelec further explains, "Ich möchte nicht, dass es so klingt, als würde der Schauspieler keine Rolle spielen. Im Gegenteil. Eigentlich sehe ich das, was die Kamera macht, wie sie ihn fotografiert und das, was ich ihm gebe, was er sagen kann, als ein Geschenk von uns, es ist das Geschenk, *dass er sich als Mensch zeigen kann*."[410] Schanelec is convinced that cinema enables actors to reveal something about themselves, an idea which recalls Bresson's notion of cinematic performance as "BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors)."[411]

This brings us back to the question of opacity and what may be called Berlin School's principle of restraint. Similarly to Eggert's performance in *Marseille*, Serpil Turhan's creation of Deniz, the female protagonist in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, relies heavily on the actor-model's own material existence. Throughout the whole film, Turhan's bodily expressions are reduced to a minimum; in fact, her acting style can be considered even blanker than Eggert's in *Marseille*. Consequently, some critics have described Deniz as a Bressonian figure, whereas others, apparently less informed about the historical lineage of this particular approach to performance, have emphasised Turhan's lack of acting skills.[412] But regardless of how we think about Turhan's talent, we need to understand her extremely flat performance mode as a stylistic choice and part of the director's material attitude to the human figure. Arslan's film deliberately, and even more radically than Schanelec's, employs the leading actress as a human model in the Bressonian sense, thus emphasising Turhan's presence: being instead of seeming.

Der schöne Tag, more than other Berlin School films, provides us with plenty of opportunities to observe the protagonist's face in detail. Yet despite often rather long takes that allow full views of Deniz's face, her extreme facial expressionlessness gives no hints about her state of mind. There are practically no changes in the protagonist's facial appearance, which is extremely serious and focused throughout the whole film

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[410] Angela Schanelec in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Angela Schanelec, Reinhold Vorschneider," 33 (emphasis added).

[411] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 1.

[412] See Thomas Schick, "Stillstand in Bewegung: Raum, Zeit und die Freiheit des Zuschauers in Thomas Arslans Der schöne Tag und Angela Schanelecs Mein langsames Leben," in *Kino in Bewegung: Perspektiven des deutschen Gegenwartfilms*, ed. Thomas Schick and Tobias Ebbrecht (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), 79–103.

(Fig. 20). Whereas in Schanelec's *Marseille* we can still observe very small, subtle movements in Sophie's face, in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, as a result of what can be considered Turhan's refusal of acting, Deniz's facial expressions become practically indiscernible.

FIGURE 20: RESTRAINED EXPRESSIONS (DENIZ)

In addition to the absence of facial expressions, we need to draw attention to the inexpressive character of the actor-character's voice in *Der schöne Tag*, its flat and monotonous tone, which becomes most evident in the film's audition scene described in the previous chapter, where neither the extensive observation of the protagonist's face nor attention to her voice allow psychological insight.[413] In this almost three-minute-long scene, Deniz gives an outline of a film that has recently made an impression on her, Maurice Pialat's *À nos amours,* yet she does this in the most unemotional manner, withholding any discernible movements of both face and voice.[414] This scene

[413] Interestingly, this scene also reflects the director's own casting practice. In the auditions for *Geschwister*, for instance, Arslan repeatedly asks the non-professional candidates to speak about a film they have recently seen. *Casting Tapes* (DVD extra of *Geschwister*, Filmgalerie 451, 2011). What is striking, moreover, is the huge number of casting or interview scenes in Berlin School films, drawing attention to the performance character of our everyday realities; in other words, acting as part of our everyday lives.

[414] Sabine Nessel has drawn attention to the fact that Deniz's film summary does not contain any mistakes or irregularities common in oral language. Sabine Nessel, *Kino und Ereignis: Das Kinematografische zwischen Text und Körper* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2008), 129.

thus illustrates in an exemplary way the film's concentration on the actor-character's opaque surface. By using the actor as pure surface or raw material, *Der schöne Tag* heightens Deniz's opacity, a fact which contributes to the director's anti-psychological approach: "Ein Zuviel an Psychologie liefert zu viele Erklärungen. Es beschneidet das Vorstellungsvermögen,"[415] Arslan has stated. As a result of the refusal to allow facial or vocal expressions to explain the human figure or trigger the spectator's emotions, we are forced to watch and listen for the protagonist's most indiscernible movements.

Not only Deniz in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* but also Sophie in Schanelec's *Marseille* speaks a flat tone and at low volume. This particular speaking mode, a melodic monotony of verbal expressions, needs to be seen as a further anti-psychological technique. Analogous to the avoidance of unambiguous facial expressions, the lack of strong alterations in tone and volume renders difficult an access to the characters' inner selves. From the very beginning, the mystery created in Schanelec's film around its female protagonist is heightened by the extreme shortage of speech. Especially in the twenty minutes following the two initial scenes with Zelda inside the car and the apartment, there is barely any talking. As elaborated in the previous chapter, in *Marseille*, as in the vast majority of Berlin School films, the impact of speech is constantly downplayed in favour of visual and sonic encounters with the world's—including the human being's—physical existence. As Christian Petzold has described the process of language reduction from the script to the actual film:

> Wir haben […] eine Szene gehabt, die drei Seiten Text im Drehbuch umfasst hat. Wir haben den Text dann auf 4 Sätze ... runtergewirtschaftet. Weil es überhaupt nicht ging. Man merkte einfach die Autorenidee, man merkte, dass den Figuren Texte untergeschoben worden sind, um sie den Lesern eines Drehbuchs nahezubringen. […] Wenn die Schauspieler die Szene begreifen, dann spüren sie, dass ihr physisches Spiel dem Text immer überlegen ist. Und wenn die Inszenierung und die Arbeit so werden, dass die Sätze, die mal da waren, eine Leerstelle hinterlassen, die interessanter ist als der Satz selber, dann ist schon mal was gewonnen.[416]

In the Berlin School directors' minimalist attitude to verbal language, as Christoph Hochhäusler has argued, dialogue appears to be "selten mehr als Geräusch […]. Was gesagt wird, wie gesprochen wird, ist oft zweitrangig."[417] In this way, the films

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[415] Thomas Arslan in Gabriela Seidel, "Interview mit Thomas Arslan," *Im Schatten press kit*, http://www.peripherfilm.de/imschatten/interview.htm.
[416] Christian Petzold in von Reden and Wulf, "Interview mit Christian Petzold."
[417] Christoph Hochhäusler in Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, "Mailwechsel," 17.

emphasise the material and non-signifying character of language. Yet despite the clear reduction, or even absence of spoken language in Berlin School cinema, it is not the case that there is no dialogue at all or that verbal expressions are of no importance. In some films (or sections of them), the characters even talk quite a lot, such as in Schanelec's *Mein langsames Leben*, the predecessor to *Marseille*. However, it is not the sheer quantity of language that matters here but its non-functionality. In marked contrast to the heavy reliance on explanatory language in mainstream cinema or television productions, speech in Berlin School films often lacks a clear narrative purpose. Again, this approach seems to be taken furthest in the films of Angela Schanelec. When asked about the non-functionality of language in her films, Schanelec states:

> Das ist so, dass die Leute Sachen sagen, die keine Funktion haben. Sie haben die Funktion gesagt zu werden, aber nicht im Hinblick auf etwas. […] Es gibt nie Sachen, die gesagt warden müssen, damit man etwas versteht, weil ein Satz jede Schönheit verliert, wenn er nur noch eine Funktion hat. […] Obwohl die Leute sehr viel erzählen, aber sie erzählen über die Handlung hinaus etwas Anderes.[418]

Instead of using language with the sole or primary purpose of either advancing the plot or providing psychological access to the characters' inner selves, speech in Schanelec's films does not function as an expression of anything. Rather, we are confronted with a mixture of stories, thoughts and ordinary statements, which are in many cases quite banal. Marco Abel reads this banality of verbal expressions in Schanelec's cinema as an "affective intervention":

> Because her films do not allow us to receive their characters' artificial use of language as more authentic and instead mark the lack of difference *within* it, Schanelec's films' deployment of language ultimately affects us with an irritating monotony caused by the sheer repetition of stilted acts of enunciation […]. It becomes sensible precisely as the very banality that in her films is inflected with an odd linguistic density, so much so that we feel that the characters' desire to express themselves, marked by their use of language, should amount to more than we ultimately can discern is the actual content of their statement.[419]

What Abel highlights here is how the artificiality of the characters' speech acts, though different from it, renders sensible the banality of everyday communication. Particularly by the combination of artificiality and banality, Schanelec's films, he suggests, emphasise the a-signifying force of language rather than its meaningfulness. For Abel,

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[418] Angela Schanelec in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Schanelec, Vorschneider."
[419] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 121–22.

Schanelec's counter-deployment of language, moreover, makes us aware of what he understands with Deleuze as the neoliberal imperative of self-expression.

Concurring with Abel's evaluation of the downplaying of language's meaningfulness in Schanelec's cinema (though less sure about his conclusions), I want to stress the ambiguous quality of the monotonously recited dialogues. On the one hand, the impression of artificiality conveyed by the literary style of Schanelec's language creates tensions with the films' genuine penetrations of the material world.[420] Yet, the even intonation and smooth rhythm of the verbal expressions, very much in accordance with a performance mode that I have called inexpressive expressiveness, hamper psychological insight and foreground instead the actor-characters' physical existence (in this case, to use Roland Barthes' term, the 'grain' of their voice).[421] As a consequence, we are forced to watch *and* listen for the small inner movements. Films like Schanelec's *Marseille* demand, as critic Andrew Tracy has suggested, "that we scour its surfaces for meaning absent the previously accessible (if tight-lipped) psyches of the characters."[422] This material-realist attitude to the human being will now be examined in two further films: Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* and Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow*.

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[420] Schanelec's use of language seems to be different (or just feels different?) in the French dialogues in her films. In his review of *Orly* (2010), the director's first film shot entirely in France (mainly at the eponymous Paris airport), critic Frédéric Jaeger has pointed to the atypical nonchalance of the almost completely French dialogues and their difference from the severity of the conversation in German: "Nur in den deutschen Dialogen findet sich die eigentümliche Mischung aus gekünsteltem Sprachduktus und banalen Wortwechseln wieder, die man von Schanelec gewohnt ist." Frédéric Jaeger, "Orly," *critic.de*, February 13, 2010, http://www.critic.de/film/orly-2036/. A similar difference between German and French dialogues can be observed in the Marseille and Berlin sections of *Marseille*. The conversation between Sophie and Pierre in the bar scene described above, for instance, radiates an ease that is almost impossible to find in the German conversations later on in the film. Asked about how the human characters have changed as a result of the translation process from the original German script into French, Schanelec has noted: "Das habe ich zum Beispiel daran gemerkt, dass ich meine deutschen Dialoge zum Teil gar nicht mehr als Untertitel für die französischen verwenden konnte, weil sich die Übersetzung an einzelnen Stellen vom deutschen Original entfernt hat. Die Figuren drücken sich anders aus. Und es ist ja sehr bezeichnend, wie sich jemand ausdrückt, insofern haben sich die Figuren auch verändert. […] Das Deutsche ist viel schroffer. Die Schönheit der deutschen Dialoge lag in einer bestimmten Knappheit, die ins Französische nicht so gut übertragbar war. Das Französische ist in gewisser Weise ausufernder, manchmal hab ich den Eindruck, es gibt eine größere Lust am Sprechen." Angela Schanelec in ibid.

[421] As Schanelec has explained the significance of the dialogue for the actors, "Über ein Mittel bin ich mir eigentlich sehr im Klaren und das ist, den Schauspielern ihren Dialog zu geben. Ich versuche so zu schreiben, dass sie sich durch den Dialog führen lassen können. […] Wenn ich einen Dialog schreibe, arbeite ich sehr lange daran und versuche bis zum einzelnen Komma hin sehr genau zu sein, so dass die Schauspieler, wenn sie es lesen, etwas begreifen, was ich ihnen schwer erklären kann." Angela Schanelec in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Schanelec, Vorschneider."

[422] Andrew Tracy, "States of Longing: Films from the Berlin School," *Mubi Notebook*, March 2, 2009, https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/states-of-longing-films-from-the-berlin-school.

Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*: Longing is everywhere

Wind, chirping birds, then an approaching car, brakes, a door opens and the engine stops. These are the sounds we hear before we see anything, or more precisely, as we follow *Sehnsucht*'s short, minimalist—white font on black background—opening credits. The first image we see is a close-up of a man in a state of physical action, breathing heavily, and apparently carrying someone or something. At first, we cannot clearly discern what he is doing (the action is outside the frame) and where he is (there is grass around him) since the shaky handheld camera lingers close to the man's head, disclosing only parts of his face, his hair, his ears, his coat. "Hören Sie mich?" he asks, a question which may give us some idea of the situation. But it is only when the film cuts to a medium shot that we can make out what is really happening: he is giving somebody first aid. As the following shots explain, he has come to the rescue after a car accident, which turns out to be a suicide attempt.

This event functions as a (melo-)dramatic starting point for the depiction of longing in Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*. The first minute already gives us a foretaste of the film's approach, which is to render sensible the protagonist's longing by having the camera, alternating between proximity and distance, capture barely visible and often ambiguous expressions of his body language.

Between fiction and document

Sehnsucht, Valeska Grisebach's sophomore feature, premiered at the Berlin Film Festival 2006 and received largely positive reviews, both nationally and internationally. In her review for the *Sight & Sound*, whose editors chose *Sehnsucht* as "Film of the Month," Catherine Wheatley argues that the director's concern, representative of a number of contemporary German-language filmmakers (but different to previous generations), is "not politics but people," an approach "that focuses on the minutiae of the desires and disappointments that characterise human relationships."[423] For critic Bert Rebhandl, on the other hand, it is the form that matters most in *Sehnsucht*, which he considers a "Heimatfilm ohne heimelige Folklore."[424] Director Grisebach, as Rebhandl suggests,

[423] Catherine Wheatley, "Fire Eats the Soul," *Sight and Sound*, June 2007.
[424] Bert Rebhandl, "'Sehnsucht': Realismus des Wünschens," *Spiegel Online*, September 7, 2006, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/sehnsucht-realismus-des-wuenschens-a-435454.html.

reveals "das dramatische Potential in der ruhigen Alltäglichkeit," and in so doing, "entdeckt für das deutsche Kino einen Realismus des Wünschens."[425]

Valeska Grisebach has been regarded as part of the Berlin School's so-called second generation, alongside Maren Ade, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler and Henner Winckler, among others.[426] Born in 1968 in the North-western German city-state of Bremen, she grew up in Berlin, a fact which makes her unique among the filmmakers associated with the School, all of whom apart from Grisebach settled in the German capital in their twenties or thirties. Like many of her fellow directors, Grisebach studied courses within the humanities—Philosophy and German Studies—in Berlin, Munich and Vienna, before turning to film.[427] In 1993, she enrolled at the Vienna Film Academy, Austrian's sole film school, with distinguished directors Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidl among the teachers. Grisebach made friends with a group of fellow students, including Barbara Albert and Jessica Hausner, who eventually became known under the name of their film production collective *coop99*.

Due to her place of study as well as her friendship and collaboration with the coop99 filmmakers—with Hausner, above all, who served as an advisor for *Sehnsucht*—, Grisebach has not only been seen in the context of the Berlin School but also associated with New Austrian cinema. In the early 2000s, Grisebach's graduation film *Mein Stern* (*Be My Star,* 2001) was screened in two different New Austrian cinema special programmes in New York and London, along with the first features of mostly female Austrian directors such as Albert, Hausner and Ruth Mader. For the filming of *Mein Stern*, however, Grisebach had already moved back to Berlin. In her just over sixty-minute-long debut feature (which was preceded by a number of documentaries), the camera (cinematographer: Bernhard Keller) tenderly observes the first steps of a

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[425] Ibid.

[426] Christoph Hochhäusler has characterised the films of Valeska Grisebach (as well as those of Maren Ade and Elke Hauck) as "tender realism," an approach that he sees as different from the work of other filmmakers associated with the Berlin School, including his own: "Now, everyone is considered a member of the 'Berlin School' who makes films with long takes, which is rather ridiculous. This really is not what connects us with each other. But I would say that Ulrich Köhler, Henner Win[c]kler, Sören Voigt, Benjamin Heisenberg and myself stylistically feel more or less at home underneath this umbrella term. Then there are some people whom we feel close to, such as Valeska Grisebach, Maren Ade and Elke Hau[c]k, whose work, however, is rather different from our æsthetic. They pursue more something like a 'tender realism,' or whatever one wants to call it, which in my opinion is miles apart from what Angela Schanelec or I do. Yet they were incorporated into 'Berlin School' as well." Christoph Hochhäusler in Abel, "Tender Speaking."

[427] However, in an interview Grisebach stated that "[i]t had been clear to me, even if only in a diffuse sense, that film would play a role in my life." Valeska Grisebach in Urs Richter, "Everybody's Different: Valeska Grisebach's Mein Stern," *Senses of Cinema* 21 (July 2002).

teenage love in the city's Mitte district.[428] The director has described her intentions for *Mein Stern* in the following way:

> The ordinary and everyday interested me. On the one hand I was moved by the orientation on traditional values, the copying of adult rituals. Of course, there are a lot of dangerous things in the world of the adolescent, but I felt – especially considering the way the cinema spectator is conditioned – I didn't want to take up the youth culture of drugs etc. The normal, the quotidian interests me. I didn't want to make a film with any generic statements about youth in the year 2000 but rather to capture a timeless and perhaps even old-fashioned moment.[429]

This concentration on the quotidian aspects of human relationships can also be observed in the director's second feature, *Sehnsucht*. This time, however, the urban setting of Berlin's district Mitte is exchanged for the village of Zühlen in the state of Brandenburg, around 50 kilometres northwest off the German capital. Grisebach here attends to the desires and disappointments of a different generation, people in their early thirties:

> Für *Sehnsucht* hat mich der Moment interessiert, wenn schon ein bisschen mehr Zeit abgelaufen ist, wenn man mittendrin ist in diesem erwachsenen Leben. Und der Hunger bleibt oder wieder erwacht, weil die Sehnsüchte ja vielleicht nicht kleiner werden. Vielleicht war Sehnsucht die Überschrift für mich, weil es ein Ausdruck für so etwas Großes ist, so etwas wie eine positive, schöpferische Kraft, die einem die eigene Beschränkung oder so etwas wie Verlust vor Augen führen kann. Unendlich und gleichzeitig Ausdruck, Entsprechung der Endlichkeit.[430]

As in *Mein Stern*, the starting point for the story of *Sehnsucht* was extensive research akin to preparations for documentary filmmaking. As explained in the press kit for the film, the director conducted interviews with approximately two hundred men and women around the age of thirty, whom she approached on the street. In these conversations, she tried to find out about the participants' *Sehnsüchte*, their personal dreams and desires. The outcome of the numerous interviews, as Grisebach explains, was twofold: almost every interviewee expressed feelings of longing—lived or unlived—, which, in turn, were mostly projected onto the field of love.

What might be called Grisebach's documentary approach to fictional films manifests itself, in addition to her interview research, in the expansive casting process

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[428] Grisebach's documentaries before her debut feature are *Sprechen und Nichtsprechen* (1995), *In der Wüste Gobi* (1997) and *Berlino* (1999).

[429] Valeska Grisebach in Urs Richter, "Everybody's Different: Valeska Grisebach's Mein Stern," *Senses of Cinema* 21 (July 2002).

[430] Valeska Grisebach in "Helden des eigenen Lebens: Interview mit Valeska Grisebach," *piffl-medien.de*, http://www.piffl-medien.de/film.php?&id=81&kat=alle#regiestatement.

for the central characters, whom the director and her team sought "bei unseren Ausflügen über Land, aber auch in Berlin, auf Feuerwehr- und Dorffesten oder in Shopping Malls"[431] over a period of six months. As the director has explained her criteria for the casting:

> Wir haben […] nicht auf äußerliche Merkmale wie "blond" oder "dunkel" geachtet, sondern auf eine gewisse Ausstrahlung. Bei dem Mann sollte ein ruhiger, jungenhafter Typ gefunden werden, der nicht gleich alles von sich preisgibt. Bei seiner Frau ging es darum, dass sie ein mädchenhafter, aber sehr willensstarker Typ ist.[432]

As in her first feature, Grisebach here again relies on non-professional actors:

> Ich wollte Darsteller finden, die mit mir gemeinsam die Geschichte auf die Beine stellen, die Geschichte erleben würden. Ich war nicht von vornherein darauf festgelegt, mit nicht-professionellen Schauspielern zu arbeiten. Das hat sich dann ergeben. Ich dachte, dass gerade dieser Film durch die Zusammenarbeit mit Darstellern, die *ihre Erfahrung, ihr Wissen und ihre körperliche Präsenz* in eine fiktive, melodramatische Geschichte einbringen, an Schärfe und Präzision gewinnen kann. Protagonisten, von denen man es nicht gewohnt ist, sie im Film, als Hauptdarsteller zu sehen. Auch um einen Ausdruck dafür zu finden, dass jeder Mensch alles empfinden, jeder Mensch ein Held, die Hauptfigur eines Filmes sein kann.[433]

Grisebach's explanation for the choice of non-professional actors is interesting in relation to my discussion of the human being as opaque surface in Berlin School cinema for two reasons: the director hints here at the significance of the performers' experience, their knowledge and physical presence, which constitutes a realist element within a fictional story; and she makes it a priority that the audience be unfamiliar with the actors on screen.

The employment of non-professional actors has largely been seen as an essential element of cinematic realism, alongside location shooting and a particular use of cinematic techniques such as depth of field or the long take. It can be traced in post-war cinema back to Italian Neorealism, whose directors for the first time relied on non-professional actors in their films. This practice formed part of what we may call Neorealism's principle of verisimilitude (an attitude which in contemporary cinema seems to be represented most prominently by the Dardenne brothers), which was clearly opposed to the dependence on well-known actors in various national cinemas,

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[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid.

particularly in the Hollywood star system. But the commitment to lay actors found its most theoretical expression in Robert Bresson's idea of a cinema in which acting—or rather, the absence of acting—played a crucial role. In Bresson's view, trained actors cannot avoid performing; consequently, only lay actors can be used as (outwardly) inexpressive models. Thus, the key aspect of Bresson's preference for non-professional actors is related to the way they act, or rather do *not* act. Different from Neorealist cinema's preoccupation with verisimilitude, Bresson's belief in the employment of non-professional actors stems from his aim to eschew performance completely.

Valeska Grisebach is not the only Berlin School director who has regularly employed lay actors for her films; one needs to mention in particular Henner Winckler and Thomas Arslan (in his first four feature films).[434] But just as one should not reduce Berlin School cinema to a narrow idea of realism, the directors' approach to performance cannot be understood with the dichotomy of trained and lay actors. In fact, we can observe a wide range of casting preferences; apart from the privileging of non-professional actors by Arslan, Grisebach and Winckler, some directors (particularly Angela Schanelec, but also Christoph Hochhäusler and Ulrich Köhler) primarily rely on theatre actors, whereas Christian Petzold repeatedly engages renowned actors such as Nina Hoss (*the* Petzold actress) or Benno Fürmann, who also play in far more commercial productions (by contrast, Julia Hummer, the leading actress of *Gespenster*, has not attended drama school).

Despite the directors' different predilections, we can nevertheless note that the vast majority of actors in Berlin School films are rather unknown to a greater audience, apparently being chosen, as Marco Abel has suggested, "for who they 'are' rather than for whom they could be."[435] Valeska Grisebach and her fellow directors thus seem to follow one of Bresson's—as well as Kracauer's—key ideas in relation to the human being on screen, namely a preference for the actors' *material existence* rather than for their ability to imitate someone else, to create a fictional character.

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[434] Randall Halle has pointed to Thomas Arslan's particular "ability to direct a cast of lay actors," a skill which, as Halle suggests, is related to the director's approach to performance: "Very little happens in his laconic films and his actors in effect must do very little. The films are heavy with an atmosphere created by a skilled camera that can frame against a loaded background […]. The lay actors succeed because the script does not require them to perform, rather the camera does the work by positioning and mapping them in physical space." Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 148.

[435] Abel, "Intensifying Life."

The sequences following the opening scene serve as an introduction to the protagonist, Markus (Andreas Müller), a metalworker (the owner of a small workshop) and volunteer fireman. However, the film does not provide us with knowledge about Markus; rather, he is depicted within his personal and work environment. In this way, we get a sense of the protagonist's personality, of his quietness and reserve: the characterisation is of an introverted man who does not speak much or express his feelings. For instance, we see him, silent, while his colleagues from the fire brigade discuss the incident he just witnessed in the film's opening sequence. The camera, moreover, closely examines Markus, mostly silent again, at work and, a little livelier this time, during a dinner with his wife, Ella (Ilka Welz), and a neighbour's family. Or we observe him in a beautiful static distance shot, a forty-second-long take, standing at a lake where his wife joins him for consolation. No dialogue here, only the rustle of the wind. This is followed by a scene in which Markus and Ella sit at the kitchen table and talk about the suicide attempt, the romantic love between Romeo and Juliet, and of their own love for each other: "Ich würde alles für dich tun," Markus says at the end of the conversation. The next shot shows the sleeping couple, Markus holding Ella tightly in his arms. All these scenes seem to suggest that Markus and Ella—childhood sweethearts, according to the press kit—live in a happy relationship.

Longing rendered sensible

Following the introduction, approximately fifteen minutes into the film, Markus and his fellow firemen go on a weekend trip to a small town, a gathering with a partner fire brigade. On the first night, a dinner takes place, which later merges into a small party with music and dancing. Nothing much happens apart from the depiction of people, chatting, eating and drinking. The whole event gives a naturalistic impression, which is conveyed by the proximity of the camera, the authenticity of the location—an old-fashioned bar-restaurant with wooden furnishings—, as well as the rather ordinary conversations of the fire brigade workers, all of whom are lay actors who play themselves.

Then, sound speakers are brought in and the music starts. While his colleagues enjoy themselves, Markus seems to be in a thoughtful mood and absent-minded. The depiction of people dancing in a lively manner to random party music is contrasted with medium close-ups of Markus, who, separated from his colleagues, observes the scene

from an isolated single chair. When O-Zone's contemporary Euro-Dance track *Dragostea Din Tei* fades into Robbie Williams's *Feel*, the camera cuts to one of the waitresses (with whom Markus will later start an affair), Rose (Anett Dornbusch), in conversation with a group of guests, and then cuts back to Markus, who in the meantime has moved to a different place in the restaurant. We have not seen how he got there and at first we do not know exactly where in the restaurant he is now located. This results from both discontinuity editing and micro framing.

The image we do get to see from Markus is a medium close-up (Fig. 21). In front of a grey curtain, with his back to the camera, he starts dancing to Williams's sentimental song of unlived desire, whose lyrics can be seen as the thematic subtext for Markus's longing: "I just wanna feel / Real love feel the home that I live in / Cos I got too much life / Running through my veins / Going to waste."[436] Whereas the background is blurred, Markus is pictured in sharp focus. The filmic space is not complex as there are only two planes. By virtue of the lack of contrast between the protagonist and the background, concentration on Markus is intensified. Dark colours dominate: he wears a navy blue fire brigade uniform and the curtain beyond him is grey. In addition, the light in the entire scene is very diffuse. However, the darkness is not sinister but draws attention to the alternating illuminated parts of the character's body and clothes. Initially, the light falls mainly on Markus's hair, ears, neck and back, as well as his jacket. The arrangement of colour and light reinforces the focus on the surface of the object, the materiality and texture of body and clothes. The illumination of certain body parts, and the simultaneous obscurity of others, excites the spectator's curiosity about the character. It makes us wonder about Markus's inner world, and we wait eagerly to see and discover more of him. It is thus significant when the light finally falls on his face (Fig. 22).

The fact that we are placed here very close to the character, along with the subtle movements of the camera, gives the impression that we are dancing with him. For a long time, however, we can see him only from behind or from the side, as he dances backwards or sideways to the camera. This can be seen as a further deployment of the rear-view figure I have discussed above. By filming Markus mainly from the back or side, the camera distances the spectator from him, which makes it difficult to identify with him. Thus, the experience the dancing scene creates is twofold: intensification and non-

[436] Robbie Williams, *Feel*, Escapology (London: EMI, 2002).

identification. As a result of the camera's proximity and the concentration on Markus's corporeality, this scene—like the film in general—provides an intimate encounter with the protagonist. Through the way Markus is placed in relation to the camera, on the other hand, along with the reduction of language and unambiguous expressions—which could be read as expressions of the character's inner self—are withheld, and in the process, the character maintains strange to us.

FIGURE 21 / 22: LONGING RENDERED SENSIBLE

As director Benjamin Heisenberg has remarked, Berlin School films have in common "that the camera does not allow the viewer to identify with the characters, but it's not really distancing us from them either. Instead, it creates and positions us in an in-between space that pulls us to and fro, ultimately holding us suspended in a middle

space that's quite akin to the characters' own subjectivity/subject position." [437] Heisenberg points here to the ambiguity and openness of characters' actions that arise from this type of camerawork. The audience is not directed as to how to feel; instead it is up to the spectator how to interpret any given scene. This results from the reduction of language, muted camerawork, the elision of background information, and elliptical storytelling, as well as restrained acting. The story of *Sehnsucht* shares similarities with the melodrama genre, yet, unlike in classical melodramas, the protagonist's emotions are introverted rather than expressed outwardly. Grisebach's film seems to follow Bresson's idea of cinema and his preferred mode of performance: "Unusual approach to bodies. On the watch for the most imperceptible, the most inward movements." [438] Even though we may not understand Markus completely and he remains strange to us, in the dancing sequence we get, if not access to his emotional world, a sense of his longing. Since he does not show his feelings in an expressive manner, it is precisely the character's small, barely noticeable inner movements that render sensible his longing.

The film's observational tone, as Catherine Wheatley has suggested, may be the result of Grisebach's background in documentary filmmaking, which "is perhaps most evident in an admirable neutrality towards her characters, which seemingly maintains a respectful distance while at the same time captures the tiniest nuances in their body language: the preponderance of close-ups and low-lighting convey a sense of intimacy […] and focus our attention on the minutiae of physical reaction." [439] By "keeping the dialogue to a minimum, she [Grisebach] allows the camera to linger over her characters' bodies and faces, asking us to read them for signs of an inner life," [440] an approach that, according to Wheatley, allows comparisons with films of the Dardenne brothers or Bruno Dumont.

Although nearly two minutes long, the dancing scene is not one long take; there are two cuts within the scene. When the first one takes place, within the first chorus of the song, and around forty-five seconds into the scene, we have hardly seen the protagonist's face. Even though this cut is easy to overlook at first sight, Markus has now turned around. The second cut, even more unobtrusive than the first one, occurs twenty

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[437] Quoted in Abel, "Intensifying Life."
[438] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 18.
[439] Catherine Wheatley, "Not Politics but People: The 'Feminine Aesthetic' of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner," in *New Austrian Film*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky and Oliver C. Speck (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 144.
[440] Ibid.

seconds later. Regardless of the cuts, the song is not interrupted, but continues, which in terms of the space-time continuum signifies a break with reality. This separation of image and sound, moreover, violates a common rule of cinematic realism, the simultaneity of the visual and the auditory. However, these two cuts, because of their near imperceptibility, do not disrupt the scene's trance-like atmosphere, evoked by the music and the camera's intensive concentration on the character, and at the same time in the sequence's detachment from the surrounding space and people in the restaurant. Another twenty seconds later, the scene ends abruptly; a sudden cut to a medium close-up of Markus lying in bed which at first, through the lack of movement and sound, appears to be a still image.

As we can see, director Valeska Grisebach consciously makes references to different modes of cinematic realism. In the entire film, as exemplified in this scene, there are shifts from naturalism to allusive micro-framing. Whereas the preceding shots in the restaurant seem almost documentary-like, the dancing sequence is more poetic, a sensory experience of and in tandem with the protagonist. This results from the clinging to the surface of the protagonist's corporeality, a concentration on Markus's body in movement.

The physical experience of dancing

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer considers movement a material phenomenon natural to the screen, which "only the movie camera is able to record,"[441] an essential part (and extension by comparison with photography) of cinema's recording functions. Dancing, alongside the chase and nascent motion, is discussed as an illustration of the medium's inherent movement: "cinematic subjects par excellence."[442] For Kracauer, however, not all cinematic representations of dancing can be regarded as proper to the medium: "Dancing attains to cinematic eminence only," he suggests—disapproving filmic reproductions of stage dancing—, "if it is part and parcel of physical reality."[443]

Sehnsucht is by far not the only Berlin School film that depicts (a) character(s) dancing. Apart from Grisebach's film, we can find dancing scenes in Maren Ade's *Alle Anderen*, Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* and *Jerichow*, Angela Schanelec's *Plätze in*

[441] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 42.
[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid., 43.

Städten, *Mein langsames Leben* and *Marseille*, as well as Henner Winckler's *Klassenfahrt*, among others. Sabine Nessel has pointed to the frequency of dancing sequences in contemporary auteur cinema (which she illustrates, apart from Lætitia Masson's *Love Me* [2000], with examples of various Berlin School films), drawing attention to the length of the scenes as well as where they take place: "Die Tanzszene ist nichts, was kurz mal eingeblendet wird, sondern erstreckt sich teilweise über einen gesamten Song von etwa zwei bis drei Minuten. Getanzt wird im Versammlungsraum der Freiwilligen Feuerwehr, im Hotel, im Schwimmbad, in der Disco, am Strand […]."[444]

Leaving aside the question of location for now (which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter), how do dancing scenes in Berlin School films differ from the way they are filmed in other cinematic approaches? Dancing sequences can be traced back to the very beginnings of cinema. In the medium's early, pre-narrative phase, described by Tom Gunning as "cinema of attractions," films were obsessed with documenting any kind of movement, and dancing as one of the oldest and most popular physical human expressions was recorded in various ways, in performances by both professionals and amateurs. Since then, we can observe various uses and functions with regard to dancing: a diversification of cinematic strategies which may be classified—apart from the rather singular case of musical films—around the terms documentary, experimental, conventional (narrative and character-orientated) and modern. Whereas in classical cinema, dancing was performed almost exclusively on dedicated stages by professional—or at least very skilled—dancers, in modern cinema from the 1960s onwards we can observe an orientation towards ordinariness both in terms of places and performers. As Sabine Nessel has suggested, "Tanzen und Nicht-Tanzen sind im modernen Autorenkino teilweise nicht mehr unterscheidbar. Fast möchte man sagen, aus Tänzern sind Tanzende geworden."[445] Nessel locates the dancing scenes in Berlin School films within this historical lineage: "Die Entauratisierung des Tanzens, die im modernen Kino durch das Betanzen von Übungsräumen, spontanes Tanzen im Alltag und durch offene Gruppenkonstellationen erreicht wird, wird im aktuellen Autorenkino der Berliner Schule weiterzugespitzt."[446]

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[444] Sabine Nessel, "Ghost Dances: Tanzszenen im aktuellen europäischen Autorenkino," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 40, no. 146 (2009): 61.
[445] Ibid., 63.
[446] Ibid.

For Wenke Wegner, too, the aesthetic strategies deployed in relation to dancing in Berlin School cinema can be situated "in direkter Nähe zum modernen Kino," yet she also draws attention to shared similarities with musical and avant-garde films: "Statt ihnen eine narrative Funktion zuzuschreiben, untersuchen die Filme mit den Tanzsequenzen das filmische Potential einer Übertragung von Körper zu Körper."[447] It is precisely this non-functionality with reference to the narrative that allows a somatic experience from screen body to the spectator's body. "Der heimliche Lehrplan der Tanzsequenzen der Berliner Schule hebt darauf ab," as Wenke Wegner further suggests, "dass tanzende Körper etwas vermitteln, das sich von Handlung und Sprache unterscheidet und als Körperübertragung bezeichnet werden kann."[448]

For Wegner, there is a close kinship between Kracauer's emphasis on camera-reality and the "dokumentarisch anmutenden Tanzszenen" in Berlin School cinema: "Lange Blicke auf Tanzende und auf das Spiel des Lichts auf den Oberflächen, gefilmt aus seiner Perspektive, die auch diejenige von unbeteiligten Beobachtern am Rande einer Tanzfläche sein könnte. 'Real time' statt manipulierter Zeit."[449] "Records of dancing," as Kracauer has noted, "sometimes amount to an intrusion into the dancer's intimate privacy. […] Looking at such discreet displays is like spying; you feel ashamed for entering a forbidden realm where things are going on which must be experienced, not witnessed. However, the supreme virtue of the camera consists precisely in acting the voyeur."[450] This observation seems to be more than suitable for the dancing sequence of *Sehnsucht*, which allows an intimate encounter with the protagonist. Here, as Sabine Nessel has observed, "wird tanzend eine Sphäre jenseits des Sprechakts etabliert, in der Gefühlszustände verdichtet wiederkehren. […] Die Kamera führt den Zuschauer nah an den Tanzenden heran und es steht eine Intimität mit der Figur, die zunächst überrascht. Die Tanzfläche, die Umgebung, das ständige Changieren des Films zwischen dokumentarischen und fiktionalen Bildern—alles das, was zuvor die Gangart des Films prägte, tritt in den Hintergrund des Körpers, dessen Tänzer die Augen die Augen geschlossen, ganz bei sich zu sein scheint."[451]

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[447] Wenke Wegner, *Kino Sprache Tanz: Ästhetik und Vermittlung in den Filmen der Berliner Schule* (Marburg: Schüren, 2015), 225.
[448] Ibid., 206.
[449] Ibid., 224.
[450] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 43–44.
[451] Nessel, "Ghost Dances," 65.

The dancing sequence in *Sehnsucht* can thus be seen as an example of exactly that aesthetic experience of physical reality which Kracauer had in mind, a sensory encounter with the human character's body that undermines the (over-)signification of verbal expressions. These two minutes can be considered crucial for the film's "Realismus des Wünschens," the moment in which Markus's longing is rendered sensible. As Grisebach has suggested,

> Der Realismus entzieht sich wieder dem Melodramatischen und Märchenhaften, und setzt ihm eine sperrige Rauheit als Widerstand entgegen. Ruppigkeit und Lakonie. *Auch die Körperlichkeit von Darstellern und Orten spielt dabei eine Rolle, ihr "Sein."* Dinge, die man nicht erfinden kann, als Erinnerung an die Wirklichkeit, das "Nicht-Gestaltete," Atmosphäre, die sich dem Melodramatischen wieder entzieht, es im guten Sinne banalisiert. Kitschig gesagt: Jeder Mensch ist der melodramatische Held seines Lebens.[452]

Grisebach's film highlights the quotidian character of longing, and in so doing, shows that dreams and desires can be found anywhere.

Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow*: No explanations

As an adjunct to Valeska Grisebach's approach to rendering sensible longing by clinging closely to the protagonist's corporeality, I will now take a close look at Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002), a film about a young man who goes AWOL from the German army. Even more than Grisebach's film, Köhler's debut feature, which premiered in the 'Panorama' section at the 2002 Berlin Film Festival, creates a mystery around the protagonist by not explaining his actions, and in so doing, confronts us with his rather opaque surface. Differently from *Sehnsucht*, however, the camera (cinematographer: Patrick Orth) mostly observes the protagonist from a rather distanced perspective.

Like many of his colleagues, Ulrich Köhler, born in 1969 in the university town of Marburg in the central German state of Hessen, did not become a film director in the most direct way. Having grown up in the provincial towns of Limburg and Diez, with a four-year stint in Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo), and largely without television at home, he discovered cinema when studying art in Quimper, France, from 1989 to 1991. After moving back to Germany for his community service (as replacement

[452] Valeska Grisebach in "Helden des eigenen Lebens" (emphasis added).

for military service), Köhler started to study Philosophy in Hamburg but eventually, through the production of Super 8 films, found his way to the Department of Visual Communication of the city's *Hochschule für bildende Künste* (University of the Arts), where he completed four short films before his graduation in 1998. To date, Köhler's work consists of three feature films: in addition to *Bungalow*, on which I elaborate below, the titles are *Montag kommen die Fenster* (*Windows on Monday*, 2006) and *Schlafkrankheit* (*Sleeping Sickness*, 2011).

Fellow director Christoph Hochhäusler has referred to *Bungalow* as "the incursion of reality into the German film,"[453] and this audio-visual incursion—following minimalist opening credits that provide us only with the names of the production company, the leading actors and the director—starts with a close up of a young man in military uniform, surrounded by other men in the same outfit sitting on benches of an army truck (Fig. 23). For about fifteen seconds, the camera rests on the face of one soldier who is largely in the shade. Tired and seemingly bored, he looks vacantly into space and, for a moment, his eyes briefly sink and he dozes off. When the young man turns his gaze, the camera follows his eyeline by gently panning leftwards, passing his snoozing bench neighbours with their similarly blank facial expressions, and shifting to a rear view from the vehicle onto the motorway where another army truck is visible to the rear. At the same time, our ears are assaulted by the constant sound of traffic noise from inside and outside the vehicle. This is when the film title in white font on black background appears: BUNGALOW.

[453] Quoted in Cathy Rohnke, "The School That Isn't One—Reflections on the 'Berlin School,'" *goethe.de*, December 2006.

FIGURE 23: AN OPAQUE STRANGER

The subsequent scene, an impressive three-minute take, is even more representative of the film's observational character, by virtue of the sheer length of the takes, and the director's preference for sequence shots. Initially filmed in long-shot, the trucks are displayed on their way from the motorway exit to the nearby service area. The camera, positioned in one of the parking slots, mostly pans (including through 360°); however, it also slightly tracks and tilts in order to keep the trucks in frame until their final arrival in the car park. When the soldiers jump off the truck and enter a Burger King, the camera gently tracks leftwards, slowly passing the crowded fast food restaurant's outdoor area, where at the rear exit the young man from the opening shot is brought into focus again, heading for a seat, with a coffee in his hand. This is when the first words are spoken; he asks a man if he could join his table: "Darf ich?"—"Bitte." His body language expresses tiredness; he flops down onto the chair, groans, takes off his cap and faces the newspaper his neighbour is reading, at which point the latter silently passes him a section ("Danke"). When the commander's order "Aufsitzen!" and the trucks' engine sound, he turns his head but remains seated, and the film cuts to his fellow soldiers mounting the two trucks which then leave the service area. We cannot be sure if the young man, Paul (Lennie Burmeister), who in this moment, by departing from his unit, becomes an individual—and crystallises as the film's protagonist—had planned to desert beforehand, or if he just spontaneously made his decision on a late-adolescent whim, since the film does not explain his behaviour. This refusal to give explanations will continue throughout the film. What the beginning of the film, moreover, already reveals is a preoccupation that goes beyond the protagonist's opaque

actions: a great attentiveness to the surrounding space. The setting does not function primarily as a supplementary feature of the story or the character; rather, in an almost topographical approach, the camera captures the characteristics of the spatial environment. One can observe this approach to taking into account the physical reality of places—exteriors and interiors—throughout the whole film.

From the service area, Paul heads to his parents' house—the eponymous bungalow—in a provincial town somewhere in the state of Hessen (a town we assume may be similar to the places where the director grew up). Shortly after he arrives, his girlfriend Kerstin drops by to let him know that their relationship is over, and his elder brother Max appears with his Danish girlfriend Lene for a stop-over on their way to Munich. Over the next few days, the parental bungalow is the place where Paul, hiding from the army police, will ignore the rather patronizing suggestions by his elder brother and become fond of Lene, Max's girlfriend.

An opaque stranger

Paul represents a type of human character in cinema whose inner world remains obscure both to the other people in the film and the spectator, thus embodying, in an exemplary way, the idea of human beings as opaque surface to which Hochhäusler refers in the quote above: a stranger whom we are allowed to observe during the film's eighty-two minutes, and who nonetheless remains a stranger, since no background information or psychological explanation for his behaviour are presented. For these reasons, he might be regarded, in accordance with Roger F. Cook, as "perhaps the archetypical Berlin School protagonist."[454] We neither know Paul's motivation for not re-mounting the army truck, nor are we provided with his reasons for not going back to the barracks later in the film. Likewise, we have to guess why he did not refuse to do his military service in the first place. In fact, when Paul is asked by a former teacher why he did not do community service (instead of military service), he ironically responds "Gewissensgründe."[455] Paul's offhand response might suggest that his decision to not refuse the military service in the first place can be read as an act of dissent against the

[454] Roger F. Cook, "Embodied Simulation, Empathy and Social Cognition: Berlin School Lessons for Film Theory," *Screen* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 159.

[455] In (West-) Germany, there was conscription for male citizens. If one wanted to do community service instead of military service, conscientious but no political reasons needed to be declared in a written text. In 2011, compulsory military service (and its ersatz service) was put into abeyance.

left-liberal consensus of his environment. Yet, this conclusion would only be based on assumptions, since it is at no time verbally expressed.

As a result of these deliberate blank spaces, the film's refusal to explain Paul's actions, *Bungalow* forces the audience to observe him carefully for any possible sign of character. Director Ulrich Köhler, who has expressed admiration for Michelangelo Antonioni's "psychologiearme Figurenzeichnung,"[456] refuses to explain his protagonist or equip him with a clear-cut identity. Moreover, the film avoids the common devices through which narrative cinema creates the spectator's identification with human characters, namely music and language. While one popular strategy to build up characters' identities and create emotional access to them, especially in films about adolescents or young people, is the soundtrack, in *Bungalow* there is hardly any music, apart from a very short moment in which Lene listens to electronic music in Paul's room, and a scene in the town's discotheque. This almost total absence of music is in line with the (non-)use of music in the majority of Berlin School films, as described in the previous chapter. By foregoing music, moreover, the director deliberately rejects one possible and frequently used option to explain the protagonist and illuminate his opacity.

In addition to the absence of music, the film does not make use of language as explanatory support to give access to the protagonist's inner world. In contrast to the predominant use of speech in narrative cinema, dialogue in *Bungalow* is extremely reduced and functions neither to advance the plot nor as an expression of the protagonist's inner self. Rather than as a carrier of meaning, dialogue is used here to render sensible nuances in the relationship of the characters such as the tensions between the two brothers. Paul's indifference and the irresponsibility of his actions are mirrored by his elder brother Max, who in the absence of the parents takes on their role and presents himself as the 'side of reason.'

Language, at least on the verbal level, thus does not help much in understanding Paul's actions. By not letting him express himself verbally, the film renders strange the protagonist, and hence his environment. Both the lack of soundtrack and the reduction of dialogue make it harder for the audience to understand Paul's actions and connect emotionally with him. In *Bungalow*, just as in most Berlin School films, we are unable to read the protagonist's state of mind. As a result, the audience is forced to observe the

[456] "Interview mit Ulrich Köhler," *basisfilm.de*, http://www.basisfilm.de/Bungalow/PMBung.pdf.

opaque surface of the human being—the object among objects—and make assumptions about their inner self.

The unfamiliar face of the leading actor (Lennie Burmeister) further supports Köhler's effort to create an enigma around the protagonist and his reasons for going AWOL. For Lennie Burmeister, a professional skateboarder but amateur actor, Paul was the first leading role. Paul's girlfriend Kerstin is also played by a lay actress, Nicole Gläser, a student from Berlin, who had recently made an impression as the protagonist in Valeska Grisebach's debut feature *Mein Stern*. For the other central figures, on the other hand, Paul's brother Max and his girl-friend Lene, professional actors were cast. Devid Striesow (Max), who studied at the distinguished drama school *Ernst Busch* in Berlin, had already made some appearances in films as well as taking on major roles in theatre productions.[457] The Danish actress Trine Dyrholm (Lene) can be regarded as the 'star' of the ensemble, having starred, for instance, in Thomas Vinterberg's acclaimed Dogma film *Festen* (1998). In *Bungalow*, she plays a Danish actress who is preparing the role of an extra-terrestrial being for a German science-fiction production, a film that will eventually be cancelled.

Since verbal expression is reduced, body language may give us some idea about the character. "The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders! […] How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy!,"[458] Robert Bresson once formulated in his plea for the reduction of verbal expression in cinema. During the whole film, Paul appears to be bored, apathetic, lethargic and phlegmatic. His state of mind is embodied by his style of walking, which may be described as shuffling and slightly slouched. Paul's hunched shoulders point to his aimlessness. Disinterested and detached from life, he shows no motivation for anything, apart perhaps from his desire to sleep with Lene, his brother's girlfriend. Nor does he express strong emotions, except during passing moments of aggression, such as a short fight with his friend, or when he points the flame of a propane torch at his brother's feet. His voice too, rather than functioning as a carrier of meaning, seems to emphasise Paul's indifference. Calm and inexpressive most of the time, it does

[457] See Brad Prager, "Striesow, Devid," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 247–54.
[458] Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 64.

sometimes articulate anger or contempt. Yet, these non-verbal expressions are played down.

To describe the performance mode in Köhler's film, it might be appropriate to borrow Frank. P. Tomasulo's observation on Antonioni's cinema that "*all* the conventional techniques of the performer's 'instrument' are pared down and minimized: facial expression, gesture, body language and movement, costume and especially dialogue."[459] For Tomasulo, this minimalist acting technique based on the credo "less is more" can be regarded as modernist. Moreover, there seems to be a connection between the performance mode and the significance of human characters in relation to the object world. Whereas conventional films centre on unified human subjectivities and provide identification with them, in material-realist cinematic approaches, on the other hand, the human being on screen is not favoured over non-human objects. As Doug Tomlinson suggests, Robert Bresson "systematically downplays the importance of the human figure, generally rendering it the equal of environment,"[460] an observation that Frank P. Tomasulo claims as equally accurate for Antonioni's cinema.[461]

Although centred on Paul and his (non-)actions, the approach of *Bungalow* similarly goes beyond the protagonist's subjectivity. Rather than offering ways to identify with Paul, the inexplicability and strangeness of his behaviour leaves room for the observation of the physical world, his social and spatial environment. The camera does the job of an alien and observes places and people as an extraterrestrial observer. Almost *en passant*, the film opens up the possibility of a distanced observation of the middle-class family, embodied by Paul, his brother and the absent and yet present parents. Despite the parents' physical absence—they are on holiday in Italy—, their presence is evoked by some casual remarks or, even more, by the architecture of the house. Without deliberately being a study of a particular milieu, the bungalow—and, by extension, the small town—functions as a social microcosm.

Following Antonioni's approach, Köhler's films depict people from his own social class. Bourgeois characters do not merely inhabit Köhler's films; rather, the depiction of

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[459] Tomasulo, "The Sounds of Silence," 98 (emphasis in original).
[460] Doug Tomlinson, "Performance in the Film of Robert Bresson: Aesthetics of Denial," in *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson, and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 77.
[461] Tomasulo, "The Sounds of Silence," 96.

this particular social milieu can be seen as a common feature of Berlin School cinema; a tendency which has been criticised as "middle class navel gazing."[462] In contrast to approaches associated with social realism, films like *Bungalow* do not concentrate on marginalised groups, nor do they aim at calling attention to social problems. In his polemical essay "Why I Don't Make Political Films"—first published in German under "Warum ich keine 'politischen' Filme mache"—, Köhler criticises films with a clear (political) message.[463] What makes cinema—indeed, art in general—genuinely political, he argues, is not the content but the form. Köhler questions the critical effect of films depicting social miseries and quotes in this context from a text by Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer about Vitorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*: "The tear in Mrs. Mueller's eye brings no poor devil his bicycle back and only [endows] Mrs. Mueller with the illusion [of being] a good person. This illusion has to be rejected."[464] By contrast, *Bungalow* as well as the director's follow-up *Montag kommen die Fenster* are centred on "Menschen, die ohne äußere Not an ihren Identitätsproblemen leiden."[465]

As Roger F. Cook has observed, "[s]everal Berlin School films feature protagonists who are haplessly struggling to carve out a place for themselves in a contemporary Germany that provides material abundance but fails to produce an environment favourable for cultural and psychological well-being."[466] For Cook, "[t]he protagonists of the Berlin School wander through contemporary Germany as if it offered a limited set of predetermined choices, all of which lead nowhere. Unmoved by the neoliberal belief that Western capitalist democracies have fulfilled their promise, they simply do not take part in the new Germany […]."[467] Marco Abel, on the other hand, reads Paul's disengagement as an "absolute refusal" akin to that of *Bartleby*, the scrivener of Herman Melville's short story, who repeatedly declares his lack of interest by simply saying "I

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[462] See Ekkehard Knörer, "Luminous Days: Notes on the New German Cinema," *Vertigo* 3, no. 5 (Spring 2007), http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-5-spring-2007/luminous-days-notes-on-the-new-german-cinema/.

[463] Köhler, "Why I Don't Make Political Films." For the original text in German see Ulrich Köhler, "Warum ich keine 'politischen' Filme mache," *new filmkritik*, April 23, 2007, http://newfilmkritik.de/archiv/2007-04/warum-ich-keine-politischen-filme-mache/.

[464] Köhler, "Why I Don't Make Political Films."

[465] Ulrich Köhler in "Interview mit Ulrich Köhler."

[466] Roger F. Cook, "Disengagement," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 87. See also Paul Cooke's contribution to this volume, "Boredom," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 67–74.

[467] Cook, "Disengagement," 89.

would prefer not to."[468] "Unlike an art of resistance, which is by definition always purposeful and thus dialectically dependent on what it resists," Abel argues, "absolute refusal refuses even to accept that the terms of the playing field are the only terms in town—terms that demand that one's response take one of the merely two basic forms: that of either obedience (yes) or resistance (no)."[469] In this sense, there is a close kinship between Paul and Armin, the protagonist of Christoph Hochhäusler's second feature *Falscher Bekenner* (*I Am Guilty*, 2005), who, for no specific reason, claims responsibility for crimes he has not committed. Unlike in Melville's short story, however, Paul's refusal, his 'I would rather not to,' is not expressed verbally but rendered sensible by his indifferent body language. In this way, the film does not provide us with knowledge about Paul and the reasons for his refusal; rather, it creates an openness and ambiguity around the protagonist's opaque actions. This is carried to extremes in the final sequence—which can be seen as a reference to the ending of Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces* (1970)—, where Paul, before our very eyes yet covert from a lorry, literally disappears.

Paul thus joins the ranks of the many human characters in Berlin School cinema who can be described as opaque strangers. As a result of the actors' restrained expressions, the strong reduction of speech and the near absence of facial close-ups, Berlin School films withhold psychological identification with human figures; we are therefore thrown back to their rather ambiguous corporeality. Moreover, as already suggested throughout my reading of *Bungalow*, the camera seems to be equally attracted by the spatial environment. This significant feature of Berlin School cinema will be the focus of the following chapter.

[468] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 279.
[469] Ibid., 279–80.

5 (Non-)Places:
The Unfamiliar in the Familiar

> Because of *the preoccupation of film with physical minutiae* as well as the decline of ideology it is in fact inevitable that our minds, fragmentized as they are, should absorb not so much wholes as "small moments of material life." […] In feature films these small units are elements of plots free to range over all orbits imaginable. […] Consider any element of such a story film. No doubt it is intended to advance the story to which it belongs, but it also affects us strongly, or even primarily, as just *a fragmentary moment of visible reality*, surrounded, as it were, by a finger of indeterminate visible meanings. […] A street serving as the background to some quarrel or love affair may rush to the fore and produce an intoxicating effect.
>
> SIEGFRIED KRACAUER[470]

This introductory remark highlights Siegfried Kracauer's concern with non-dramatic and peripheral elements in narrative cinema, that is the type of "images which do not just serve to further the action or convey relevant moods but retain a degree of independence of the intrigue and thus succeed in summoning physical existence."[471] For Kracauer, such 'small moments of material life' can be found primarily, apart from human characters' corporeality, as described in the previous chapter, in displays of the spatial environment. The medium's potential to render visible and audible the materiality of locations will therefore be the main focus of this chapter.

Kracauer's concern particularly with urban space went beyond cinema and can be traced back much further than the discussion in *Theory of Film*. In fact, there can be observed a continuous, lifelong preoccupation with this subject matter in Kracauer's work. From his numerous essays on city life in the 1920s and 1930s, comprising everyday objects, public buildings and urban venues as well as cultural or social events, to his writings on photographic media, as well as his first profession as an architect. Influenced by the spatial sociology of Georg Simmel, Kracauer's observations of metropolitan life aimed to examine the changing conditions of modernity. For Kracauer, there was a direct link between the metropolitan city, modernity and cinema, a view shared by many of his contemporaries including his friend, cultural theorist Walter Benjamin. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer's preoccupation with urban space is exemplified by numerous

[470] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 303 (emphasis added).
[471] Ibid., 231.

references to the street, the place where the city and modernity coincide. "The affinity of film for haphazard contingencies," he writes, "is most strikingly demonstrated by its unwavering susceptibility to the 'street'—a term designed to cover not only the street, particularly the city street, in the literal sense, but also its various extensions, such as railway stations, dance and assembly halls, bars, hotel lobbies, airports, etc."[472]

As we can see, for Kracauer the metropolitan street in its literal and extended sense is the characteristic place of modern life and can therefore be considered the cinematic location *par excellence*. In his writings on cinema, Kracauer refers very positively to precisely those films which not only take place in the city but devote themselves to the transient moments of urban street life—from German street films of the 1920s to post-war Italian Neorealism. Kracauer, who frequently argues against the artificiality of studio designs, can therefore be regarded as an advocate of location shooting; he would definitely have championed French director Marcel Carné's half-question, half-demand "When will the cinema go down into the street?" Yet, filming in 'real' locations is not so much a matter of authenticity but is rather seen by Kracauer as a precondition for film's particular affinity with the material world, its ephemeral and transitory elements. "The street in the extended sense of the word," he suggests,

> is not only the arena of fleeting impressions and chance encounters but a place where the flow of life is bound to assert itself. Again one will have to think mainly of the city street with its ever-moving anonymous crowds. The kaleidoscopic sights mingle with unidentified shapes and fragmentary visual complexes and cancel each other out, thereby preventing the onlooker from following up any of the innumerable suggestions they offer. What appears to him are not so much sharp-contoured individuals engaged in this or that definable pursuit as loose throngs of sketchy, completely indeterminate figures. Each has a story, yet the story is not given. Instead, an incessant flow of possibilities and near-intangible meaning appears.[473]

Kracauer's reflections on the fleeting and indeterminate character of street scenes share similarities with André Bazin's emphasis on the ambiguity of peripheral details, labelled by him as image facts. In "An Aesthetic of Reality," his first of several essays about what would become known as Italian Neorealism, Bazin suggests that the concrete "fact" rather than the abstract "shot" should be considered the smallest "unit of cinematic narrative," defining the fact as "[a] fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full

[472] Ibid., 62.
[473] Ibid., 72.

of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact, thanks to other imposed facts between the mind establishes certain relationships."[474] Bazin's notion of image facts as ambiguous fragments of pro-filmic reality dissociates itself from the fragmentation of space into multiple singular shots in (classical) Hollywood cinema.[475] In fact, he stresses the importance of displaying the variety of material details *within* the image in order to maintain their indeterminate quality (rather than being reduced to functional and symbolical elements).[476]

Apart from the obvious kinship between Kracauer's and Bazin's belief in cinema's affinity with the indeterminate and peripheral object world (differences between the two notwithstanding), we can forge a bridge to what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze has termed pure optical and sound situations. In *The Time-Image*, as described in the previous chapter, Deleuze suggests that in post-war films one can observe the loosening of sensory-motor connections between images, which he sees as fundamental for early and classical cinema, and simultaneously, the rise of pure optical and sound situations. For Deleuze, "a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself;"[477] in other words, a shot (with its visual and sonic components) that does not refer directly to the previous or the following one, and is thus not significant for the film's continuity:

> The optical and sound situations of neo-realism contrast with the strong sensory-motor situations of traditional realism. The space of a sensory-motor situation is a setting which is already specified and presupposes an action which discloses it, or prompts a reaction which adapts to or modifies it. But a purely optical or sound situation becomes established in what we might call "any-space-whatever," whether disconnected, or emptied […].[478]

Deleuze here takes Bazin's concept of image-facts with reference to Italian Neorealism as a starting point, and yet distances himself from the former's belief in the medium's

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[474] Bazin, "Aesthetic of Reality," 37.

[475] As a matter of fact, we are dealing here with two different ideas/practices of realism and inherent treatments of space; the continuation of time and space within a single shot, on the one hand, and the illusion of such continuation through editing and the position of camera and human characters, on the other hand.

[476] For Bazin, this is achieved paradigmatically in Italian Neorealist films, and particularly in Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946)—a film which Kracauer also admired)—, praising these directors for their ability "to shoot successful scenes in buses, trucks, or trains, namely because these scenes combine to create a special density within the framework of which they know how to portray an action without separating it from its material context and without loss of that uniquely human quality of which it is an integral part." Bazin, "Aesthetic of Reality," 38.

[477] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 20.

[478] Ibid., 5.

particular relationship with pro-filmic reality (Kracauer is not mentioned in Deleuze's two *Cinema* books). For Deleuze, the essence of filmic images cannot be understood at the level of reality but rather with respect to their affective force. Yet despite Deleuze's objection to film's bond with pro-filmic reality, his notion of pure optical and sound situations, particularly in conjunction with what he calls "any-spaces-whatever" (a concept on which I will elaborate below), seems to be useful for the discussion of places and spaces insofar as it puts emphasis on the kind of filmic elements that lie beyond the story and individual actions. Furthermore, Deleuze's conception draws attention to sound, so that we can expand the fragments of visible reality, as described by Kracauer and Bazin above, to include fragments of audible reality.[479]

In addition to his emphasis on the fragmentary and ambiguous character of material reality, Kracauer draws attention to cinema's ability to render unfamiliar our familiar spatial surroundings. On the one hand, this results from film's technological capacity to reproduce pro-filmic reality. Moreover, the camera reveals what Kracauer calls blind spots of the mind, referring to quotidian phenomena that generally remain unnoticed or are imperceptible to the human eye, but which the camera is able to bring to the fore. Of the different types of objects which "stubbornly escape our attention in everyday life,"[480] the familiar seems to be of particular significance for his notion of cinema's revelatory potential. In Kracauer's view, it is precisely the familiarity with our proximate environment which prevents us from perceiving it in our daily life routines:

> Intimate faces, streets we walk day by day, the house we live in—all these things are part of us like our skin, and because we know them by heart we do not know them with the eye. Once integrated into our existence, they cease to be objects of perception, goals to be attained.[481]

Whereas the strong familiarity with these quotidian objects makes it difficult for us to notice them in our daily lives, cinema is capable of "alienat[ing] our environment in exposing it."[482] This estrangement derives from film's relative arbitrariness in its relation to the material world and, as Miriam Bratu Hansen put it, "its alienation from human intention and control"[483] as a photographic medium. As Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie

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[479] One needs to mention here that Bazin's and Kracauer's writings on cinema stem from a time before synchronized sound recording was made possible and film's rendering of audible reality became actually significant.
[480] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 53.
[481] Ibid., 55.
[482] Ibid.
[483] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 27.

San Juan have aptly observed, Kracauer's insistence on the medium's particular relationship with physical reality is "not simply about the real as a thing already in the world, but as something in the world that film, through its apparatus, alters and enables to be seen anew."[484] In other words, film by its very nature defamiliarises the familiar and, in so doing, makes us re-see our mundane and well-known yet hidden surroundings:

> The way leads toward the unfamiliar in the familiar. How often do we not come across shots of street corners, buildings and landscapes with which we are acquainted all our life; we naturally recognize them and yet it is as if they were virgin impressions emerging from the abyss of nearness.[485]

For Kracauer, film's revelatory power thus lies in its ability to render strange our familiar environment, enabling us to perceive well-known aspects of the world we live in from a new perspective, one could say with the eyes of a stranger. But even though the medium's inherent nature favours these new perspectives on the quotidian, it depends on the filmmaker not to pass up that opportunity but to use the available cinematic methods and devices in a way that makes us perceive visible and audible reality anew. According to Kracauer, only by clinging to the surface of things is cinema able to unveil the unfamiliar in the familiar and create a new awareness of the often taken-for-granted and overlooked spatial environment.

The Adherence to (Non-)Places

How then is this new awareness of overlooked space created in cinema's treatment of space and location? With reference to the so-called spatial turn, the increasing preoccupation with space and spatialization in social and cultural theory since the 1970s, Mark Shiel has emphasised cinema's "status as a peculiarly spatial form of culture":

> Cinema is a peculiarly spatial form of culture, of course, because (of all cultural forms) cinema operates and is best understood in terms of the organization of space: both *space in films*—the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various settings in sequence in a film; the mapping of a lived environment on film; and *films in space*—the shaping of lived urban spaces by cinema as a cultural practice; the spatial organization of its

[484] Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan, *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 19.
[485] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 55.

> industry at the levels of production, distribution, and exhibition; the role of cinema in globalization.[486]

Of these two aspects of the medium's particular relationship with space, as described by Shiel, the focus in the rest of this chapter lies entirely on the former: space is considered in (Berlin School) films, both in relation to the kind of environment that is displayed and the way this is (re-)presented. Below, I continue my survey of Berlin School cinema through the lens of Siegfried Kracauer's material aesthetics by looking at the films' treatment of locations, a feature which, I suggest, plays an essential part in their approaches to physical reality. Indeed, the directors' attitude to the spatial environment can be considered the perfect example of their endeavour to render visible, audible and sensible aspects of the socially defined material world. Berlin School films, as Cristina Nord has suggested, "finden eine spezielle Verbindung zu ihren Schauplätzen. Mit Milieuschilderung hat das nichts zu tun, eher mit der Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit, von der Siegfried Kracauer schrieb—mit dem Surplus, dass sich gerade in der Konkretion eine Überwindung der Konkretion abzeichnet."[487] Nord's remark suggests that precisely the films' rigorous reification, their adherence to the material world, both visually and acoustically, transcends this very material world. The filmmakers' practice is not so much aimed at portraying a social environment (as in social realist films) but rather at rendering visible and audible the materiality of locations. Berlin School films' treatment of space is therefore related to Kracauer's notion of cinema's redemptive potential.

That the films discussed in this study have in common an aim to capture the physical presence of places and spaces is confirmed by the following statement from Thomas Arslan: "Schauplätzen Präsenz geben, diese nicht nur als Hintergrund abrufen, weil das für mich genauso wichtig ist wie die Erzählung selber. Das herzustellen, durch die Genauigkeit der Beobachtung und nicht durch große dramatische Behauptungen, das interessiert mich."[488] In Arslan's films as in those of other Berlin School directors, settings are much more than sheer façades, as is mostly the case in mainstream cinema.

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[486] Mark Shiel, "Cinema and the City in History and Theory," in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 5 (emphasis in original).

[487] Cristina Nord, "Notizen zur Berliner Schule," *new filmkritik*, July 7, 2007, http://newfilmkritik.de/archiv/2007-07/notizen-zur-berliner-schule/.

[488] Thomas Arslan in Susanne Gupta, "Berliner Schule: Nouvelle Vague Allemande," *fluter*, August 31, 2005, http://film.fluter.de/de/122/film/4219/.

Whereas the spatial environment serves in the latter as the background for the plot, the surroundings in Berlin School films never appear to be subordinated to the stories around human characters; rather, they often gain importance in their own right.[489] In accordance with their overall observational approach, the films integrate non-dramatic and peripheral 'small moments of material life,' thus displaying the spatial environment 'for its own sake.'

Berlin School cinema's adherence to the material world can thus be observed with regard to both human beings and the spatial environment. Moreover, the characters' experiences often appear to be interconnected with the surroundings. "Jede Figur ist bei mir mit dem Raum verbunden, in dem sie—zu welchem Zeitpunkt auch immer—agiert. Diese Relation ist mir grundsätzlich wichtig: der Raum und die Personen als Ensemble. Das schafft mehr Komplexität, als wenn man Personen isoliert von dem, was sie umgibt,"[490] as Thomas Arslan has commented on the relationship between human figures and locations in his films. And fellow director Angela Schanelec, asked about the question of space, has remarked that "es ist ja gar nicht möglich, sich Leute ohne Raum vorzustellen."[491] This can be observed in several films where the female protagonists wander through cityscapes, such as in Schanelec's *Marseille*, Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* or Petzold's Gespenster, where we literally explore the locations with them. Similarly, the main character's phlegmatic attitude in Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* opens up an examination of the surrounding provincial town. In these approaches, as Marco Abel has suggested, manifests itself the films' "ethnological gaze," which allows us to observe "contemporary Germany as if from the perspective of a stranger": "As we flaneur with the protagonists through often unrecognizable spaces […], we are afforded the chance to hone our ability to sense and perceive a degree of strangeness within what otherwise might simply appear as the normal, mundane environment in which many middle class Germans dwell."[492] By offering an experience of the entire material world, of human beings within their spatial surroundings, the films contribute to the

[489] In *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), a brilliant film essay about the ways Los Angeles has been presented in cinema, director Thom Andersen argues that the city functions on screen either as a background (habitually), a character (occasionally) or a subject (rarely).

[490] Thomas Arslan in Wolfgang Nierlin, "'Jede Figur ist bei mir mit dem Raum verbunden': Ein Gespräch mit Thomas Arslan über seinen neuen Film 'Im Schatten' und das Verbrechen als Existenzform," *www.filmgazette.de*, June 27, 2010, http://www.filmgazette.de/index.php?s=essaytext&id=16.

[491] "Angela Schanelec on Spaces," *Cine-Fils*, , http://www.cine-fils.com/interviews/angela-schanelec.html.

[492] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 17.

redemption of physical reality, yet it is a reality which is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.

The documentation of places

"Wenn man den Raum ernst nimmt," Thomas Arslan has suggested, "fließt zwangsläufig etwas Dokumentarisches in den Film ein. So eine Szene hat einen erzählerischen Zweck und ist zugleich ein Dokument, indem sie fotografisch bewahrt, was danach mitunter verschwindet."[493] Arslan's remark can be seen as a direct reference to an understanding of the photographic image as a snapshot, a document of pro-filmic reality at a particular moment in time. The medium's capacity to capture what is in front of the camera, though holding true for the entire object world, seems to apply more than anything to places and spaces. Outdoor shots, in particular, possess a documentary quality. For this reason, location shooting has been considered a key element of cinematic realism, an understanding which derives mainly from French film critic André Bazin and his appreciations of Italian Neorealism. Directors like Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica and Luchino Visconti, for both political-aesthetic and economic reasons, fled the studio and shot their films on location. Notwithstanding the stories around human characters, in films such as *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946), *Ladri di biciclette (Bicycle Thieves*, 1948*)* or *La terra trema* (1948), 'real' places come to the fore, thus rendering visible cities, landscapes and villages of post-war Italy.[494]

In the late 1950s, following the Neorealist role models, directors of the French New Wave, including the likes of Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, also left the studio and began to shoot their films on location, devoting themselves extensively to the streets of Paris, a practice which since then has been adopted by generations of auteur filmmakers worldwide. For Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, the employment of real places is one of cinema's unique virtues: "They are there before they signify, and they signify because they are there; they are not there merely in order to be bearers of

[493] Thomas Arslan in Nierlin, "Mit dem Raum verbunden."

[494] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has pointed to the fact that what in the moment of filming is a depiction of the present becomes a document of the past in the moment of viewing: "At first sight the neorealist film seems only to declare: this is how things are. In fact, it is saying: this is how things were. For by the time the audience sees the film, what is being shown is a testimony to what the filmmaker (in this respect similar to the still photographer) saw at a particular time. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Cities: Real and Imagined," in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 105.

signification. The fact of being able to work with real materials, which retain their original quality however much they are artistically transformed, is a privilege which filmmakers neglect at their peril."[495] In this context, Nowell-Smith particularly highlights, apart from the afore-mentioned filmmakers, the work of Michelangelo Antonioni.

Likewise, the films discussed in this study are entirely shot on location, which, in accordance with the filmmakers' non-manipulative commitment, remain largely unchanged, though interiors, particularly flats and houses, may have been (re-)arranged. Cinematographer Reinhold Vorschneider has described as follows director Angela Schanelec's attitude towards places and spaces in her films,

> Ich glaube idealtypisch ist es schon, dass man das alles sozusagen in der Wirklichkeit findet. Du [Angela Schanelec] beschreibst es ja auch für Dich immer als einen spannenden Prozess, von diesem Text in eine Art Realität zu gehen. Das sind natürlich fragwürdige Begriffe. Sozusagen diesem Gedachten eine vorgefundene oder dokumentarische Dimension dazu zu geben. Deswegen ist es idealtypisch schon so, dass man die Orte findet, und, wenn es irgend geht, auch so belässt wie man sie vorfindet. Das geht natürlich bei Wohnungen nur bedingt.[496]

As we can see, the authenticity of locations plays a crucial role in Schanelec's idea of cinema, in a fashion similar to the importance of direct sound recording, as described in chapter 3. Like the non-manipulative use of sound, for Schanelec location shooting is both an aesthetic and ethical choice, which ensures a certain bond with reality for her fictional stories. Christian Petzold's cinematic realism too, though different from Schanelec's, involves the idea of locations as documents. "In den Orten, in denen wir drehen," he explains,

> gehen wir manchmal mit den Schauspielern in die Stadtbücherei und lesen über die Geschichte des Ortes. Ich finde, das Spiel der Schauspieler muss in Kontakt treten mit Realität. In Wittenberge, wo wir mehrere Filme gemacht haben, ist diese Realität der Untergang der DDR-Industrie, auch wenn sie in der Narration keine Rolle spielt. Doch wenn man die Gebäude filmt und sieht, wie 28 Schauspieler eine Fabrik verlassen, die für 3000 Arbeiter gebaut wurde, dann gehen die ganz anders, wenn sie vorher über die Geschichte der Veritas-Werke gelesen haben, wo früher Singer-Nähmaschinen hergestellt wurden. Die Geschichte hängt noch in diesen Gemäuern. Da beobachte ich die Schauspieler von weitem. Das ist dann kein Blick, sondern ein Dokument.[497]

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[495] Ibid., 107.

[496] Reinhold Vorschneider in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Schanelec, Vorschneider," 17.

[497] Christian Petzold in Sarah Khan, "'Ironie kotzt mich an': Ein Interview mit dem Filmregisseur Christian Petzold, dessen neuer Film Phoenix im Herbst in die Kinos kommt," *Frieze d/e*, November 2014, http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/features/ironie-kotzt-mich-an/.

Whereas for Schanelec cinema's documentary dimension is related to pro-filmic (sonic) reality recorded on the films' (exterior) settings, Petzold's remark points to the specific history of places, a past which, despite not being part of the narrative, is somehow redeemed by the registration of the camera. Yet, the indexical relationship between the image and the pro-filmic world, the "capacity of film to provide rigorous documentation of what comes before the camera,"[498] serves only as the foundation from which the Berlin School directors, who go beyond any simple belief in the medium's documentary qualities, start their approaches to the material world. Even though Berlin School films provide us with images and sounds of real locations, such 'documents' are always clearly constructed by the filmmakers' distinctive treatments of space. It is nevertheless important to stress the fact that cinema's visual and sonic documentation of existing locations results in a form of archive, a collection of fragmentary images and sounds which is deeply related to Kracauer's notion of redemption.[499]

(Un)Familiar topographies

The fact that several Berlin School film titles make reference to locations—a building, a city—may already point to the significance of this issue. In this sense, Angela Schanelec's *Plätze in Städten* (*Places in Cities*, 1998) is perhaps the archetypical Berlin School film title, although one needs to stress the fact that Berlin School cinema's attention to settings goes beyond metropolitan sites.[500] As discussed previously, only about half of the films associated with this movement take actually place in the German capital—which is one of the reasons why the label Berlin School has been seen as problematic—, with plenty of films set in the country's often overlooked yet no less representative periphery. In fact, the majority of these films are not set in urban centres but rather in provincial—often suburban and sometimes rural—environments such as the Hesse small town in Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* or the Brandenburgian village in Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*. For Christian Petzold, Berlin School cinema's preoccupation with

[498] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 85.
[499] As Martin Jay has suggested, the primary goal of Kracauer's work was "to rescue the contingent from the flux of time and redeem it from oblivion." Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 180.
[500] A further indication: around a third of the contributions to the *Berlin School Glossary*, a collection of essays about this group of filmmakers, are related to space: Ambient Sound, The Anti-Hauptstadt, Borders, Cars, Dorfdiskos, Familiar Places, Forests, Hotels, Landscape, Pools, Urban Miniatures.

the provincial results from the filmmakers' attention to milieus which, though more characteristic for the country, have largely been neglected or stereotyped in German cinema. As he suggests,

> In den neunziger Jahren, als wir unsere ersten Filme drehten, war Deutschland noch sehr stark geprägt von der alten Bundesrepublik, es war ein sehr dezentrales Land. Doch die Provinz tauchte in den Filmen oft nur als Karikatur auf, man sah verschrobene, manchmal etwas bekloppte Leute. Dabei definieren sich 99 Prozent aller Deutschen über Autos, Reihenhäuser und Bausparverträge. Diese Welt wollten wir erkunden und dabei zeigen, dass auch in ihr große Geschichten, große Tragödien spielen können.[501]

For Petzold, the exploration of the provinces in (early) Berlin School films goes along with a great sensitivity to the settings: "Wir tun so, als ob es einen Marktplatz gibt, aber der heißt direkt 'Neuer Markt,' und es gibt immer dieselben Läden, immer Schlecker, Eiscafé San Marco, Pommesbude, noch drei, vier Friseure, ein Fachgeschäft für Elektrogeräte—so sehen diese Städte immer aus. Und trotzdem leben 80 Prozent der Deutschen in solchen zersiedelten Städten, die aber in Filmen nicht auftauchen."[502] The fact that the large majority of Germans do not live in urban centres but in suburban areas or small towns, characterised by Petzold as "Schlafstädte" [dormitory towns], should thus, according to him, be reflected in cinema. In this context, the rendering of the Hesse provincial landscape in Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* may be seen as paradigmatic for the Berlin School's material approaches to underrepresented locations. In Köhler's film, as Cristina Nord has aptly observed, "Die spezifische Topographie—das Haus am Dorfrand, die grünen Hügel, die Terrasse—rückt als etwas ins Bild, was einfach da ist. Es muss nichts signalisieren, genausowenig muss es als Metapher für eine bestimmte Mentalität oder Befindlichkeit herhalten."[503] As we will see, Berlin School films—whether set in urban or suburban areas, small towns or transit spaces—can be considered micro-approaches that render visible and audible less recognisable and rather unspectacular areas and, in so doing, reveal the unfamiliar in the familiar of our present-day surroundings.

"When a film shows Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square, St Paul's Cathedral, Piccadilly Circus, red buses and black taxis," Charlotte Brunsdon writes in *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City Since 1945*, "you

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[501] Christian Petzold in Beier, "Autos, Reihenhäuser und Bausparverträge."
[502] Christian Petzold in von Reden and Wulf, "Interview mit Christian Petzold."
[503] Nord, "Notizen zur Berliner Schule."

know you are in London. This is the shorthand iconography of location, 'landmark London,' which allows film-makers to indicate that their stories, or particular parts of their story, are set in London." [504] Brunsdon's introductory remarks on landmark iconography not only apply to London, but can easily be adapted to other big cities—particularly capitals—with highly recognisable places. Analogously to the depiction of the world-famous London sites as listed above, the framing of locations such as the Brandenburg gate, the Victory Column, the Cupola of the Reichstag or the Television Tower is regularly used to clearly indicate that we are in Berlin. The German capital has become increasingly popular as the setting for both national and international productions over the last twenty-five years, and with very few exceptions, these films provide us in abundance with images of the renowned city landmarks. Even though in principle location-shot films may "offer fresh views of familiar landmarks," [505] as Brunsdon further suggests, this endeavour is rendered difficult by the extreme familiarity, that is overfamiliarity, of iconic places.

The question of the overfamiliarity of familiar sites is relevant in relation to Kracauer's belief in cinema's ability to reveal the unfamiliar in the familiar environment, as we can assume that the prominent display of highly recognisable locations might block rather than incite the spectator's engagement with the surroundings. It is therefore significant that the Berlin School directors almost completely refuse to show renowned places in their films. This applies not only to those Berlin School films with rather provincial settings; even the films set in the German capital refuse to display representative sites and examine in their stead quotidian and non-specific spaces. Instead of depicting the landmarks of Berlin, the directors devote attention to the kind of public spaces which often lack clear singularity.

The filmmakers' preoccupation with non-referential locations, according to Brigitta Wagner, "can be termed the *Anti-Hauptstadt*," and is characterised by the "avoidance both of Berlin and of clearly visible markers of place." [506] This attitude, Wagner argues, "is at once hyperlocal and transnational in its assault on Berlin's hackneyed topographies." [507] In Valeska Grisebach's debut feature *Mein Stern*, for

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[504] Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City since 1945* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 21.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Brigitta Wagner, "The Anti-Hauptstadt," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 35 (emphasis in original).
[507] Ibid.

instance, we do not get to see any of the various iconic places of Berlin's central district of Mitte, despite the proximity of the setting to landmarks like the Brandenburg Gate or the Reichstag. Likewise, the Berlin films of Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold and Angela Schanelec share an absence of such familiar sights; instead, they orientate themselves towards the everyday spaces habitually overlooked in cinematic representations.

Non-Places

Berlin School cinema's preference for rather unknown and non-symbolic yet familiar (because ordinary) sites can be related to what French anthropologist Marc Augé has coined non-places. Taking Michel de Certeau's distinction between place and space as a starting point, Augé develops the concept of the non-place in contrast to the anthropological place, suggesting that "[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place."[508] In his conception, non-places are "all the air, railway and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles, the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets."[509] For Augé, non-places are products of what he calls supermodernity, excessive spatial expressions of a present that has detached itself fundamentally from the past.[510] Different from places in prior stages of modernity, these contemporary spaces are "are not themselves anthropological places and […] do not integrate the earlier places."[511] Despite their oppositional character, places and non-places should not be understood as absolute categories, as Augé notes "that either place or non-place really exists in the absolute sense of the term."[512] He suggests that "[p]lace and non-place are rather like opposed polarities, the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten."[513] Thus, it is the relative level of

[508] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 63. For de Certeau, places are defined by their stability, whereas spaces are created through movement. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[509] Augé, *Non-Places*, 64.
[510] Supermodernity, Augé notes later on in the book, "stems simultaneously from the three figures of excess: overabundance of events, spatial overabundance and the individualization of references." Ibid., 88.
[511] Ibid., 63.
[512] Ibid., viii.
[513] Ibid., 64.

abstraction, and therefore alienation, which for Augé makes the basic difference between places and non-places.

The notion of alienation in relation to the spatial environment evokes the approach of another French thinker, urban cultural theorist Henri Lefebvre. Throughout his work, Lefebvre was concerned with the question of how capitalism transforms not only the workplace but all aspects of people's everyday lives, most prominently in their relation to social space. In his most renowned book, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre traces the historical development and changes in both the employment and the perception of space, which he describes with the categories absolute, historical and abstract space. For Lefebvre, abstract space is space under capitalism, social space dominated by the market, in which everything is organised in zones. Both a material manifestation and representation of the capitalist production system, abstract space, as Lefebvre further suggests, leads towards increasing fragmentation and abstraction, thus alienation. What Lefebvre highlights is the connection between the (capitalistically constituted) spatial environment and human beings' everyday lives, which he sees as deeply intertwined. Thus, we can observe a shared preoccupation between Lefebvre and Siegfried Kracauer with the spatial aspect of people's "lived experience," which both saw as being related to rising abstraction and alienation. However, whereas Kracauer argued for film's potential for re-experiences of the material world, Lefebvre considered cinema an incriminated space which, because of its fragmentation makes abstract space even more abstract, detached from lived experience.

Yet despite his pessimistic attitude toward cinema, Lefebvre's conception of abstract space, spatial organisation under capitalism, as well as Augé's notion of non-places are useful tools for an analysis of the type of places and spaces recurrently displayed in Berlin School films. Augé's conception of non-places, moreover, shares similarities with Gilles Deleuze's notion of "any-spaces-whatever." In the preface to *Cinema 2*, Deleuze suggests that in modern cinema—from Italian Neorealism onwards—we can observe the emergence of "spaces which we no longer know how to describe [..], deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction;"[514] in other words, spaces which lack singularity: non-places.

[514] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.

Many Berlin School films confront us with this kind of non-place: the ordinary, monotonous and anonymous places and spaces of our daily lives, that are however very often neglected in mainstream cinema. "Wir kennen diese Orte deshalb nicht," as Sabine Wolf has suggested, "weil wir ihnen bisher wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt haben. Dieses Defizit vermögen die Arbeiten der Berliner Schule zu reduzieren, weil sie die Kamera auf diese Nicht-Orte richten und dadurch sowohl 'neue Blicke' eröffnen als auch eine 'neue' Wahrnehmung lehren können."[515] Drawing on Georg Simmel's influential essay "Philosophie der Landschaft," Wolf reminds us that it is actually our gaze which constructs what we call landscape, and suggests that for the examination of the films' treatment of space, we need to have in mind three characteristics that are immanent to the activity of seeing in general; these are the subjectivity of the gaze, the intentionality of the gaze, and the gaze as the foundation for the act of seeing as well as for perception and orientation in space.[516] As Wolf further suggests,

> die fraktalen Stadtlandschaften sind uns auch deswegen häufig so fremd, weil wir uns hier nicht auf Orientierungsstandards, wie die bekannten Wahrzeichen einer Stadt verlassen können. Wir müssen uns […] eigene Orientierungsparameter, Merkzeichen und Landmarks suchen. Dies können bauliche oder temporäre Elemente sein wie bspw. eine Bushaltestelle oder Trampelpfade auf Brachen und in Grünanlagen in Petzolds *Gespenster*.[517]

The Berlin School directors' refusal to provide us with postcard images of representative places should thus not be seen as an end in itself. Rather, the absence of such key landmarks within urban settings is only the starting point for the films' engagement with spaces of mundane and contemporary character, and a further reason why they require active viewers. Moreover, the filmmakers' treatment of the spatial environment is not only related to the question of *what* is (not) depicted—the choice of locations—but also refers to the issue of *how* settings are filmed. We can observe, for instance, the almost total absence of wide shots through which, in accordance with conventions invented in the classical era of Hollywood cinema, a place is usually established; many Berlin School films start instead with rather narrow framings.[518] In Berlin School cinema, we are thus confronted with fragments of spatial reality rather than the world as a whole. Locations

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[515] Sabine Wolf, "Die urbane Landschaft in den Filmen der Berliner Schule," *Cinema* 54 (2009): 40.
[516] Ibid., 42.
[517] Ibid., 47.
[518] Giuliana Bruno has pointed to the fact that film by its nature dislocates the viewer, and that mainstream cinema aims to re-establish spatial stability. Giulina Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002).

maintain a degree of (non-sinister) mysteriousness, akin to the films' ambiguity around the human figures. Indeed, the films' attitude towards places and spaces can be seen as closely related to their concentration on human characters' corporeality, their opaque surfaces, as described in the previous chapter. As a result of the absence of landmarks and the way the spatial environment is filmed, familiar surroundings are rendered unfamiliar, which forces spectators to orientate themselves and observe the spatial environment with greater attention.

Marseille: Exploring the 'Street'

Ich finde es gut, von Orten auszugehen.

ANGELA SCHANELEC[519]

More than any of her colleagues, Angela Schanelec seems to embody the rejection of landmark Berlin. Her films regularly highlight the city's non-illustrious urban and suburban spaces. In Schanelec's cinema, the camera pays attention to areas within Germany's capital which, due to their rather anonymous character, cannot be easily recognised as part of the city, an attitude which Schanelec equally pursues in the Paris sections of her films *Plätze in Städten* and *Mein langsames Leben*, both of which are arguably among the more unusual cinematic representations of the French capital. The director's technique of defamiliarising and deemphasizing locations can also be observed in the Marseille segments of her eponymous film. *Marseille* does not provide us with characteristic images of the Mediterranean city—no landmarks or otherwise familiar sites are shown.[520] Instead, Schanelec's film confronts us with a rather mundane version of the city, an approach which renders visible and audible the street in its various forms.

Schanelec challenges the typical depictions of Marseille by avoiding common places such as *Le Vieux-Port*—the city's picturesque Old Port and its historic and cultural

[519] Angela Schanelec in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Schanelec, Vorschneider," 14.

[520] As Daniel Winkler writes in *Transit Marseille*, a study of filmic representations of France's second biggest city: "Schanelec macht Marseille zu einem positiv besetzten Ankerpunkt in der existentiellen Identitätssuche der Berliner Fotografin Sophie. *Marseille* bedient zwar das Thema der Kriminalität, verbindet es aber mit einer innovativen Filmästhetik und einem alltäglichen Marseille fern der altbekannten Filmorte." Daniel Winkler, *Transit Marseille: Filmgeschichte einer Mittelmeermetropole* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), 291.

centre—or *Les Quartiers nord*, the marginalised Northern districts. When doing research in Marseille in preparation for the film in March 2002, almost a year before the film was shot, Schanelec stayed in the *Unité l'Habitation*, the first and most famous brutalist housing building by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, located outside of the centre, which now also hosts a small hotel. Yet, this distinguished building, an architectural landmark of the city, equally loved and hated by admirers and enemies, did not make it into the film. What we see instead are several of the city's more anonymous buildings and ordinary apartment blocks, less renowned and inventive yet therefore perhaps more representative than Le Corbusier's modern classic. As Schanelec writes in her Marseille diary, "Cité Le Corbusier. In Marseille gibt es unzählige Häuser wie dieses, mit mehr oder weniger Leidenschaft berechnete Zellanhäufungen, und in jeder Zelle Leben."[521]

For reasons concerning local lighting conditions, Schanelec decided to shoot *Marseille* in February, a time when, as a result of the often cloudy sky above the Mediterranean city, the light is only moderately bright (in contrast to the dazzling brilliance or very even illumination in summer), circumstances which seem to produce the right images for a film not aiming to provide us with postcard pictures but preoccupied with the experience of mundane urban life.[522] As Schanelec has stated, her choices of locations are based on criteria which have to do "mit dem Licht, mit der Architektur, mit einer Vorstellung davon, wo Leute sein könnten, und mit unserem ganz persönlichen Geschmack."[523] Apart from aesthetic preferences, Schanelec's personal idea of beauty, (interior) spaces are chosen in such a way that one can imagine the human character(s) inhabiting them (first objective: authenticity), yet impersonal enough to not become self-explanatory (second objective: ambiguity). As cameraman Reinhold Vorschneider explains,

> Die fotografische Dimension von Orten ist ein sehr wichtiges Entscheidungskriterium. Dass man das Gefühl hat, in dem Raum kann man einen Auschnitt finden, der eine Einstellung werden kann. Das heißt, das der Raum auch einen gewissen autonomen Impuls hat, unabhängig von der sozialen

[521] Angela Schanelec, "Marseille 1. - 10. März," *new filmkritik*, March 12, 2002, http://filmkritik.antville.org/stories/22796/.
[522] I took this information from Harald Fricke, "Das Leben ist keine Talkshow," *die tageszeitung*, September 23, 2004.
[523] Angela Schanelec in Hochhäusler and Wackerbarth, "Interview: Schanelec, Vorschneider," 14.

> Definition, so dass es sozusagen wegen des Raumes zu einer Einstellung kommt.[524]

In Schanelec's cinema, locations are not only of rather quotidian character but also extremely neutral insofar as they do not invite for symbolic or further interpretations; rather than a matter of signification, the materiality of both the visual and sonic environment is revealed. The treatment of space thus constitutes an integral part of Schanelec's particular cinematic realism. This can be observed, on the one hand, in relation to her non-manipulative approach to real locations, involving the commitment to direct sound recording described in chapter 3, and the distinctive image composition of largely static shots, on the other. Whereas filming in real locations serves as the realist foundation for Schanelec's fictive stories, artistic choices with respect to frame, focus, distance etc. indicate the camera's selection of the existing physical environment.

The importance of the spatial environment for Schanelec's approach is reflected by the fact that her search for locations takes longer than is usual, often several months. In the case of *Marseille*, the director travelled to the French city and subsequently developed the screenplay based on the impressions she gained from her ten-day trip: "Ich hatte die Geschichte geschrieben, und diese erste Reise nach Marseille, als ich alleine dort war, hat das Drehbuch, was ich dann angefangen habe, extrem beeinflusst. Es gab Szenen, die ich nur geschrieben habe, weil ich vorher in Marseille war."[525] During her visit, Schanelec perceived the city as "big, sprawling, and confused […]; very bright and driven by an almost irrational force":

> I had the impression that nobody there holds onto anything solid, people there accept their lives, maybe they are forced to, but still they accept their lives. In any case, that was the feeling I got from the city, somehow it made me happy. Of course it's true that you see an unfamiliar city in a different way than the city in which you live, but that is one of the points of my film: the way one's view of things changes. That's why Sophie makes photos, in order to see. She photographs in order to see, and thus to understand. And through other people and things she is able to understand something about herself. Marseille is a city in which this seemed possible to me. Marseille inspired me; to make exactly this film. And it is situated on the sea. The hope, that the sea will offer comfort, gives things a perspective.[526]

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[524] Reinhold Vorschneider in ibid., 15–16.
[525] Angela Schanelec in ibid., 13.
[526] Angela Schanelec in "'Du musst dein Leben ändern': Fragen zu Marseille," *Marseille press kit*, http://www.peripherfilm.de/marseille/Presseheft%20Marseille%2019.04.04.pdf.

One gets a sense here of how much actual places and the particularities of Marseille have influenced Schanelec's film. It was not only Marseille's status as a port city, situated next to the Mediterranean sea, but also its roughness and less picturesque architecture (at least in the traditional sense), compared to pretty holiday locations on the French Riviera such as Cannes or Nice, that motivated Schanelec's choice of Marseille as the protagonist's refuge and place of yearning. [527] Even though her film does not aim to be a portrayal of Marseille, it uses the material characteristics of this "big, sprawling and confused" city to create an overall sensation of drifting through an unfamiliar urban environment, a sense of losing and finding oneself.

Fragments of a city

In Schanelec's film, the city of Marseille is not properly established, and there are only a few indicators which help us to identify where we are, such as the French language or glimpses of the sea from Zelda's apartment (which we, however, do not see properly until the final scene). Moreover, the name of the city is not mentioned until Sophie's conversation with Pierre around thirty minutes into the film, except for the film title in the opening credits and the half-hidden city map which Zelda buys for Sophie in the opening scene. However, Sophie does not use the map of Marseille, a fact which is significant insofar as she—as much as Schanelec's film—does not seem to be interested in guidance, let alone tourist attractions, but rather the act of drifting and what we might call a subjective exploration of the city. As a consequence, the setting remains mysterious, akin to the opacity with regard to the human figure discussed in the previous chapter. Marseille's strangeness results primarily from the absence of familiar sites, the often narrow and static framing, the avoidance of establishing or reverse angle-shots, as well as the highly elliptical storytelling with recurrent abrupt changes between 'actions' and places. Instead of presenting Marseille as a whole, Schanelec's film provides us with fragmentary views of the spatial surroundings. In this way, Schanelec forces us to observe the environment more carefully, demanding a spatial inspection which, due to the use of direct sound recording, also involves listening to the city's soundscapes.

[527] We may understand the [un]picturesque city of Marseille, following Giuliana Bruno's description of a Naples sequence in Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage in Italy* (1953), which in turn draws on a comment in Charles Dickens's *Pictures from Italy*, as a "new picturesque." Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 382.

Marseille takes us on a journey, a trip to the eponymous city, which we explore together with Sophie, the female protagonist. The film begins with Sophie's arrival; in the opening shot, we approach the city from inside the car, a view from the back seat, which gives us a rather narrow perspective not only on the human characters directly in front of us but also of the spatial surroundings beyond the front window (see Fig. 1 and 2). What we get to see outside, only slightly out of focus, while driving with Zelda and Sophie through the urban setting are fleeting impressions of buildings, streets and the traffic—passing cars and pedestrians—, and at the same time, the clearly discernible ambient sound of the spatial environment. In the half-hour following this shot, the film provides us with further fragmentary views of the city's mundane areas. Yet, differently from our position inside the car in the opening shot, this examination will take place mainly on foot.

After a brief exchange of keys (and songs) between the two women in Zelda's sparsely furnished apartment, Sophie is alone in the unknown city. From her temporary residence, she starts her explorations of the city, and the camera follows her on her quotidian strolls and journeys. We see her walking along streets—sometimes determined and energetic, sometimes tentative and contemplative—, taking a bus to the outskirts, looking around, taking pictures, eating fruit, attempting to enter a cinema (which is closed), running to catch a bus, waiting at a metro station, sitting outside of a bar etc., as well as again and again, wandering around, observing and photographing. The urban landscapes which are displayed during Sophie's strolls are mostly anonymous, locations which lack singularity, such as residential streets, town houses, apartment blocks, a car repair shop, a greengrocery, small shopping areas, urban wastelands, street corners, the motorway. None of these sites are spectacular, yet the series of images and sounds, of visible and audible city fragments, exerts a magnetic pull on the spectators. This strange attraction arises from our engagement with the protagonist's unmotivated drifting, a particular experience of observing someone we do not know much about moving through an unfamiliar (and defamiliarised) environment.

FIGURE 24: EXPLORING THE STREET

Drifting through (un)familiar surroundings

By accompanying Sophie, the film creates a haptic experience of space through the protagonist's movements and a double mode of observation: we watch how Sophie gets to know the city, and in so doing, we also explore *en passant* the spatial environment. As Volker Pantenburg has described the twofold experience of observing Sophie observing Marseille:

> Eine halbe Stunde lang bin ich allein mit jemandem, der allein in einer fremden Stadt ist. Die langsame Annäherung, die sich zwischen Sophie und Marseille abspielt, bildet deshalb auch das Verhältnis zwischen mir und Sophie ab. Eine Stadt kennenlernen, einen Menschen kennenlernen, das ist—Sophie fotografiert—über Blicke gesteuert. Was bedeutet, dass mir viel Zeit eingeräumt wird, jemandem beim Sehen zuzusehen.[528]

Schanelec's film gives us plenty of time to examine the opaque surfaces of both human character and location, and the camera's arbitrary attitude towards the object world renders our observational gaze manifold, with the result that we cannot but watch the protagonist, and at the same time, the spatial environment. The film's concentration on material reality is emphasised by the almost complete absence of dialogue during the first thirty minutes of the film, a fact that heightens our curiosity and let us observe both character and location with more attention. The visual experience of the physical

[528] Volker Pantenburg, "Nochmal Marseille," *new filmkritik*, August 31, 2005, http://filmkritik.antville.org/stories/1203882/.

environment is intensified by the ambient soundscapes of *Marseille*, which consist predominantly of quite conventional street noises of the urban environment (whose volume is not muted, as in mainstream cinema).

Even though we accompany Sophie on her explorations, and therefore get to know the places with her, the film does not adopt her point of view. The vast majority of shots are static, yet it is the camera's motionlessness which renders sensible the protagonist's motions. In addition, the depictions of Sophie's wanderings through the city vary in terms of visual composition, alternating between proximity and distance, subjective and objective viewpoints, as well as different degrees of depth of field, variations which change our perception of space. For a certain length of time, we are positioned quite closely behind or next to Sophie, observing her strolling around or taking pictures, shots in which the spatial surroundings are slightly out of focus, before the film suddenly cuts to a long shot of a street corner at dawn. We see Sophie traversing the street, and then how she, now very small in the background, next to large digital billboard, takes pictures in our direction, while in the foreground transitory impressions of the city traffic are captured (Fig. 25). (Later on in the film, asked by a police officer what she photographs, Sophie hesitantly replies: "streets.") In the remarkably framed low angle shot that follows, the spatial environment moves even more to the foreground; the image displays a massive stone bridge, and in the background, visible through the bridge arches, a concrete tower block, whereas the protagonist, who is crossing the bridge, becomes almost imperceptible (Fig. 26).

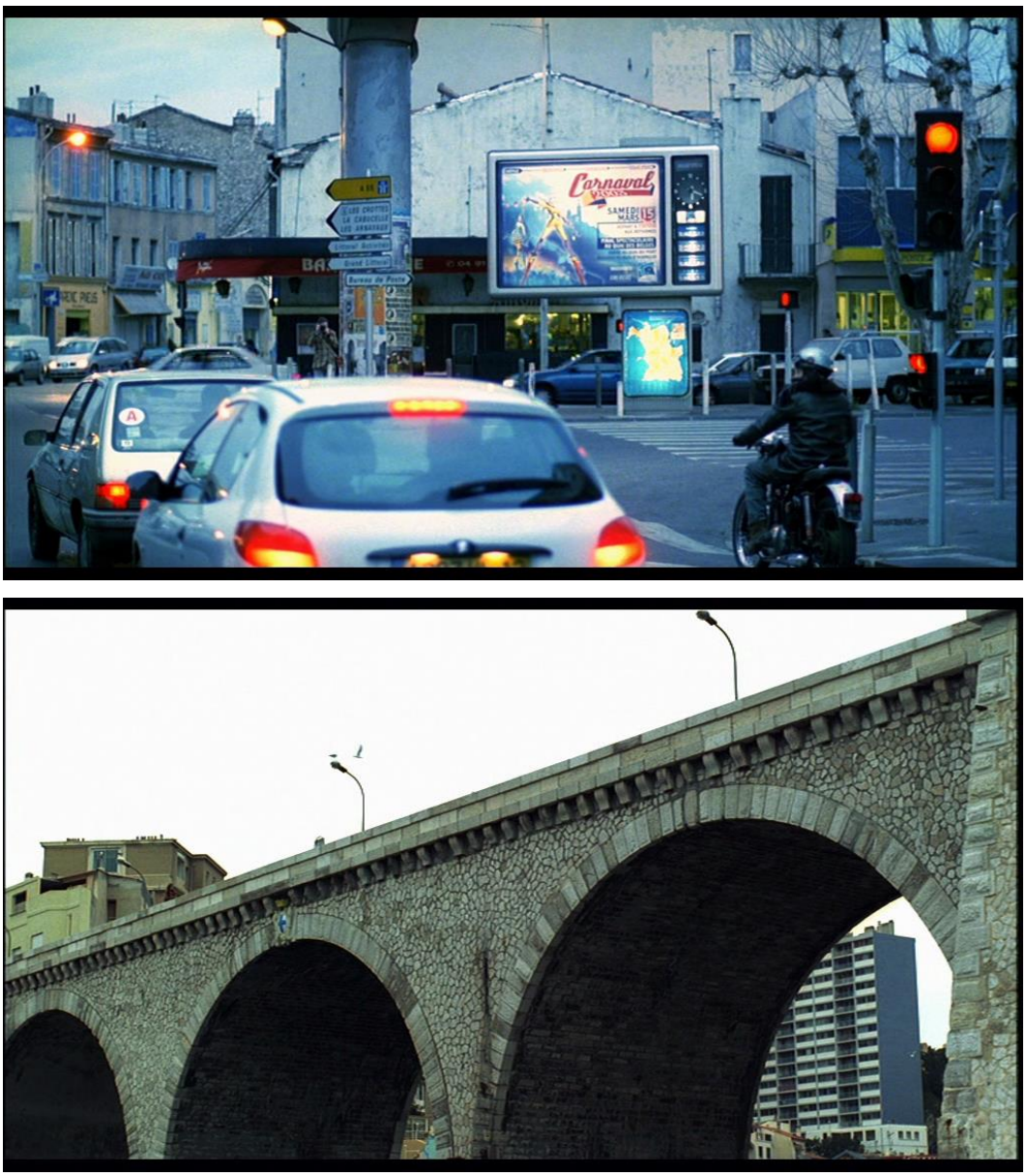

FIGURE 25 / 26: FRAGMENTS OF A CITY

On the acoustic level, the persistent traffic noise of the previous scenes has transformed into clearly discernible sounds of birds and the sea. This shot in particular, though by far not the only one, illustrates perhaps best the significance and relative autonomy of places and spaces in Schanelec's cinema; the spatial environment is not depicted to develop the story or describe the character but becomes important in its own right.

Sequences like this, because of their independence from preceding and following shots, come close to Deleuze's definition of pure optical and sound situations. Director Dominik Graf is struck by Schanelec's approach to the city, suggesting that "bei nahezu jeder längeren Länge der Einstellungen nicht zu sehr die Absicht spürbar wird, sondern dass sich die Atmosphäre innerhalb der Zeit quasi auszudehnen beginnt, dass die Bilder

wachsen. Und dass sich damit der Eindruck von einem Bild, den man bekommt, sekündlich vertieft wie ein Rinnsal, das sich in den Sand eingräbt. Man inhaliert die Stadt."[529] Indeed, it is precisely because of these non-dramatic moments of visible and audible reality that *Marseille* creates a strong sense of place, a sensation of being there.

The elliptical montage, which creates continuous leaps in time and space, is carried to extremes halfway through the film when, without any prior indication, we unexpectedly find ourselves in Berlin. Just now Sophie was still in Marseille, spending time with Pierre and his friends in an Arab music bar (the only music we get to hear in the entire film); but after an abrupt cut, we suddenly see her at a street corner in Berlin. Initially, we perceive the change of place only because Sophie is addressed by a young woman in German (the chat with her neighbour in the following scene will make the situation a bit clearer). In Berlin, too, the film continues to provide us with fragmentary moments, yet there are two major differences compared to the Marseille section: first, a gradual disappearance of the heroine in favour of other human figures, her best friend, Hanna, and her husband, Ivan (a fact which casts a certain doubt on the very concept of main and secondary characters); and secondly, a radical shift from the numerous depictions of Marseille's public spaces, the 'street' in various forms, and Sophie's drifting through the city, to the predominance of interior shots in the Berlin part. As a result of these changes, the film conveys a sense of Sophie's relationship with the two spatial surroundings; for her, Marseille is an unfamiliar place, which she, a solitary stroller and photographer, explores with curiosity; in Berlin, on the other hand, which lacks that novelty and strangeness, she mostly stays inside, apparently trapped in old habits and structures. One can sense the difference when Sophie leaves for Marseille a second time, a move which feels like a liberation from the entrenched situation in Berlin, and which is epitomised by an assault on her arrival in the city, in which all her belongings, her clothes and passport, are stolen.

The film ends with four static shots of the beach and the sea, in the last (and longest) of which we can detect Sophie (only because of her new yellow dress) in the background of the image as she walks along the beach; the protagonist and the spectators have finally reached the place of yearning. But even though the film's open ending certainly makes us speculate about the protagonist post-diegetic life, we are also

[529] Dominik Graf in Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, "Mailwechsel," 38.

invited to observe the surroundings: the sea, the beach, the people, the buildings in the background. Here, *Marseille* once again redeems the material environment, visually and acoustically. In contrast to the dominant metropolitan soundscapes, the sound of the sea waves as well as noises from activities on the beach—a ball game, screaming children, a barking dog—reach our ears. "Wie der Strand und das Meer klingen," Volker Pantenburg writes, "das habe ich bisher nirgendwo so gehört wie in den letzten Einstellungen von 'Marseille.'"[530]

Der schöne Tag: Mapping the Mundane City

> Gebannt schaut man Arslans Heldinnen und Helden zu, wie sie eigentlich nichts Besonderes tun. Tatsächlich bewegen sie sich nur von hier nach dort. Oft zu Fuß, manchmal mit öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln. Auf ihren Wegen und Gängen entsteht ganz nebenbei eine soziokulturelle Landkarte ihres Stadtteils [...].
>
> ANKE LEWEKE[531]

Similarly to the concentration on quotidian urban landscapes in Schanelec's *Marseille*, Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* features metropolitan sites of a rather mundane quality, which are usually less well represented in cinema or television productions, as well as the observation of a female protagonist moving through the city. Berlin is not established with images of iconic landmarks; for instance, when the film depicts Deniz as she walks through the subterranean corridors of the train station *Alexanderplatz*, we do not get to see the square's TV tower, one of the city's most iconic buildings, which has been shown excessively in post-reunification films as an indication of the German capital, particularly its Eastern part. Instead, ordinary spaces come to the fore, both visually and acoustically, revealing housing complexes, parks, streets, and above all, various means and locations of the city's public transport. Throughout the film, the camera extensively accompanies Deniz on her inner-city journeys, and in so doing, provides us with numerous displays of places and spaces within the German capital.

At the beginning of *Der schöne Tag*, Deniz, the female protagonist, stands in her boyfriend's sparsely furnished apartment. She looks at her boyfriend, who is still

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[530] Pantenburg, "Nochmal Marseille."

[531] Anke Leweke, "Das Kino der schönen Wege: Thomas Arslan und seine wunderbaren Berlin-Filme," *Die Zeit*, July 12, 2011, http://www.zeit.de/2011/28/berlin-filme-arslan/komplettansicht.

sleeping in the bed, before turning her gaze away by 180 degrees. When she leaves the flat, the camera follows her on the way, as she goes down the staircase, traverses a small park, sits on the underground, and finally arrives at her own apartment. This extended opening sequence not only provokes the sensation of real time but also demonstrates the film's topographical approach to Berlin, its mode of mapping the city's quotidian spaces, as well as its emphasis on the protagonist's pathways between locations. During the seventy minutes of the film, we accompany Deniz walking or commuting from one place to another, be it her boyfriend's or her own apartment; her workplace, a dubbing studio; the *Schlachtensee*, a lake located in the south-western suburbs (where she breaks up with her boyfriend); her mother's flat; an acting agency; the *Tiergarten*—the city's large central park (where she wanders with Diego); a Chinese restaurant close to the *Bahnhof Zoo* (where she eats with her sister), as well as different bars (where she has chats with Jan, Diego, and a university professor).

The first two parts of Arslan's Berlin trilogy, *Geschwister* and *Dealer*, are set almost exclusively in Kreuzberg and Schöneberg, boroughs with a large minority of Turkish-German residents. In both films, a number of scenes take place on the street, and a strong focus lies on the characters' walks through their neighbourhood. With the trilogy's third part, *Der schöne Tag*, Arslan continues and expands his explorations of Berlin's quotidian urban spaces, as well as the protagonists' movements within these spaces. Leaving the rather narrow settings of *Geschwister* and *Dealer*, the film follows Deniz through larger parts of the German capital. Here, Deniz's flat is already situated on the verge of the district, an area where Kreuzberg meets the boroughs of Mitte and Tiergarten.[532]

Topographical realism

The choice of the protagonist's apartment location was intentional, and the starting point for the planning of Deniz's pathways through Berlin, which, as Arslan has emphasised, comply with the city's actual topography:

[532] The way in which the different Turkish-German characters in Arslan's Berlin trilogy make use of the space has been read by a number of scholars in terms of either ongoing restrictions or increasing possibilities for the children of Turkish immigrants, a perspective which, in turn, has been criticised by Marco Abel for its identitarian logic. See, for instance, Göktürk, "Turkish Women on German Streets"; Gallagher, "Limitation of Urban Space." See for Abel's non-identitarian reading, *Counter-Cinema*, 42–48.

> Ein wichtiger Aspekt war die Wahl des Standortes ihrer Wohnung, weil davon ausgehend ihre Bewegungen durch die Stadt geplant werden mußten. […] Ausgehend davon wurden schließlich die Wege von Deniz genau festgelegt. Sie sollten sich nach der realen Topographie der Stadt richten. Es stört mich immer sehr, wenn ich in manchen Filmen sehe, wie das alles wahllos, oder nach Kriterien des Pittoresken, gemischt wird. Wenn z.B. Straßen, die in völlig anderen Teilen der Stadt liegen, als benachbarte behauptet werden. So etwas ist, wenn es einem auffällt (und es fällt immer jemandem auf), sehr enttäuschend. Es ist, als wenn man darauf spekuliert hätte, daß der Zuschauer schon nicht so genau hingucken wird. Eine lieblose Art der Täuschung.[533]

Arslan's faithful attitude to the city's real geography, identified elsewhere as topographical realism,[534] stands in stark contrast to other turn-of-the-century Berlin films. For instance, Tom Tykwer's breakthrough *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998), the first internationally successful post-unification Berlin film, does not care much about the city's real topography and uses Berlin more as a backdrop for the story. In fact, Tykwer has commented on the very limited importance of the actual place for *Lola rennt*: "What happens is absolutely universal as far as both theme and content are concerned. […] The film could be just as easily be set in Peking, Helsinki or New York, the only thing that would change is the scenery, not the emotional dimension." [535] The 'spatial infidelity' of Tykwer's film can be seen as rather typical for the representation of space in mainstream cinema, if we follow film scholar Richard Misek's observation,

> When individual shots are edited together, the result usually involves spatial discontinuity, temporal discontinuity, or both. In commercial cinema, shots tend to be edited together in such a way as to conceal this discontinuity. A film-maker may, for example, use a shot of two actors walking along a street, then—as they turn a corner—cut to a shot of the actors continuing their walk in a location shot several miles away. By doing so, the film-maker re-orientates urban space to fit the film, surreptitiously demolishing and rebuilding the city on screen.[536]

Yet despite this predominating cinematic practice, there are alternate and more faithful treatments of urban space, as Richard Misek in his account of French director Eric Rohmer's geographical approach to Paris demonstrates. According to Misek, Rohmer's

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[533] Thomas Arslan in Gabriela Seidel, "Interview mit Thomas Arslan," *Im Schatten press kit*, http://www.peripherfilm.de/imschatten/interview.htm. (Quoted in Schick 2011)

[534] Tobias Hering, "Irgendwo muss das Leben ja stattfinden," *Der Freitag*, November 23, 2001, https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/irgendwo-muss-das-leben-ja-stattfinden.

[535] Tom Tykwer in "Run Lola Run: Director's Statement," *Sony Pictures*, http://www.sonypictures.com/classics/runlolarun/ statement/statement_text.html. Notwithstanding the "um jeden lokalen Realismus unbesorgte Berlin" (Ekkehard Knörer), *Lola rennt* played a part in promoting the German capital and contributed to its rising popularity at the turn of the 21st century.

[536] Richard Misek, "Mapping Rohmer: Cinematic Cartography in Post-War Paris," in *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance*, ed. Les Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 54.

films, as a result of the director's "topographical continuity," create a map of Paris that attempts to deal accurately with the city's real topography. Misek's reflections draw on an essay by François Penz on the distinctive cinematic strategies of presenting Paris in Rohmer's *La femme de l'aviateur* (*The Aviator's Wife*, 1981) and Jacques Rivette's *Le Pont du Nord* (1981). Penz argues that the two films not only display different areas of the city but also deal with the existing geographical space in particular ways.[537] Whereas Rivette's treatment of Paris, described by Penz as "creative geography," is more concerned with the emotional dimension of spaces than their faithful representation, the "topographical coherence" of Rohmer's film—indeed the director's entire oeuvre—aims to produce an "accurate portrayal of everydayness."[538] As Penz further suggests, "Rohmer uses everyday landmarks […] to validate the topography of the city as well as orientate the spectator."[539]

We can regard Arslan's topographical verisimilitude in his treatment of Berlin as allied to Rohmer's mapping of the French capital, both of which steer clear of the cities' touristic landmarks.[540] Yet, while Rohmer's films are full of street or metro signs that indicate where we are located, in Arslan's cinema we can find far fewer props to spatial orientation for the spectator. Even though a small number of real locations are mentioned in *Der schöne Tag*—the *Schleusenkrug*, the bar in the Tiergarten where Deniz and Diego arrange to meet, or *Christburger Straße*, the destination of Deniz's cab ride—there are hardly any obvious visual reference points, perhaps with the exception of the metro station *Eisenacher Straße,* which we are once able to spot in the background. The city in Arslan's film, just as in Schanelec's *Marseille*, is highly defamiliarised and deemphasised, and therefore not easily recognisable (unless one knows Berlin very well), with the result that the urban spaces appear familiar (because of their mundane character) and unfamiliar (because of their anonymity) at the same time.

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[537] Peter Wollen has pointed to the fact that "[a]rchitecture in film is never just itself. It is always a simulacrum of somewhere else, a symbolic representation of some other place. […] This is not simply a question of location versus studio set, it is more that the city of one director is a different place from the city of another director, and cinema architecture reflects that difference." Peter Wollen, "Architecture and Film: Places and Non-Places," in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2002), 199.

[538] François Penz, "From Topographical Coherence to Creative Geography: Rohmer's *The Aviator's Wife* and Rivette's *Pont Du Nord*," in *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, ed. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 137.

[539] Ibid.

[540] For this reason, Arslan's use of Rohmer's *Conte d'été*, though not a city film, in *Der schöne Tag* might be understood not only as a reference to the film's theme—questions of love and relationship—, as argued in chapter 3, but also as a reverence to the French director's faithful approach to locations.

Empty spaces

Yet, Arslan's approach to urban space should not be reduced to the question of topographical verisimilitude. What is striking not only in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* but in various city films by his fellow directors is the relative emptiness of the public spaces they feature, an emptiness which can be seen as diametrically opposed to the predominance of the crowd in early city films such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) or Curt and Robert Siodmak's *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*, 1930), films which, despite their differences, share a tendency to disclose the flow of the city in street scenes of crowd mobility. Even though movement and assemblages of people, both seen as expressions of metropolitan and modern life, continued to attract filmmakers in the post-war era, most prominently in films associated with Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave, we can observe the emergence of new approaches to (urban) landscapes by modernist directors. Arguably it was the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni (especially in his so-called Italian tetralogy), in which individuals were massively displayed in empty spaces for the first time, an emptiness has often been interpreted as a metaphor for the alienation of the modern human being. The visual minimalism, on the other hand, may facilitate the observation of material phenomena and the spatial environment. Because of the solitude of the protagonist within urban landscapes, films like Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* can be linked to Antonioni's concern with empty spaces, yet one needs to be careful with the interpretation of such spaces as representations of human alienation.

Notwithstanding the emptiness of public spaces—and the protagonist's isolation within it—during most part of the film, *Der schöne Tag* draws attention to the flow of the city, yet it is a flow different from the lively atmosphere of crowded street scenes which Kracauer and other writers often emphasised in their discussions of (early) cinematic representations of metropolitan life. Even so, Arslan's film shows the city (and the protagonist) in the process of constant flux and transformation. The fluid and transitory character of urban space (and life in general) is rendered sensible by the protagonist's movements, her frequent walks and journeys on the public transport. Moreover, the locations displayed in *Der schöne Tag* are predominantly transitional spaces: train stations, means of transportation (metro, tram, bus), streets, parks and housing complexes. Such spaces, as Thomas Schick has suggested, are characterised by

"Anonymität, Einsamkeit und fehlende Identität"[541] and can therefore be regarded, in accordance with Augé's definition described above, as non-places.

In Arslan's film, however, the city is presented not only as a place of alienation but also of chance and new experiences (a feature which can be linked to Kracauer's emphasis on cinema's affinity with the fortuitous). Take, for instance, the two accidental encounters between Deniz and Diego on subterranean train stations. The first time, their eyes meet briefly while they wait for their trains on opposite platforms at *Anhalter Bahnhof*, located closely to Deniz's apartment. Diego is the first who gets on the train, and while departing, they continue looking at each other through the coach window. Their second chance encounter takes place on a further underground platform at *Alexanderplatz*, and this time they get together on the train. Here, again, Deniz and Diego exchange looks—yet no words—in the coach, changing trains and following each other, before reaching the Tiergarten, where they finally start a conversation. The absence of language in this sequence—in fact, all the public transport scenes are without dialogue—invites us even more to observe not only the characters and their gazes at each other but also the petty details of the mundane urban spaces. The film's observational mode is intensified by the long duration of the shots (which applies to all the scenes that take place on metros, trams or trains), which actually forces us to observe and, as in Schanelec's *Marseille*, listen; the whole sequence is 'underscored' by the direct sound of the railway system, the ordinary noises of approaching and departing trains, the screeching of the railways, as well as platform announcements. By these means, Arslan's film pays attention to the soundscapes of Berlin and, in doing so, renders sensible, similar to the visual field, quotidian and casual aspects of city life.

Rather than attempting to be an authentic representation of urban city life, *Der schöne Tag* seeks to exhibit the extraordinary in the ordinary surfaces of Berlin. The fact that nothing much happens on the plot level makes us observe the little things, be it the protagonist's corporeality or the texture of Berlin's public spheres. There are various sequences in which Deniz is depicted as she walks through subterranean corridors of metro stations, and as a result of the emptiness, we can concentrate on minor details like the colour of the tiles; and during her rides on the underground, our eyes may catch the pattern of the bench. Or take the number of shots in which Deniz walks by the

[541] Schick, "Stillstand in Bewegung," 86.

camera: Arslan (or editor Bettina Blickwede) does not cut directly to the next shot; instead, the camera continues to observe Deniz as she continues her stroll, moving away from us, which opens up for us a panorama of the spatial surroundings (Fig. 27 / 28).

As we can see, the emptiness of the visual field facilitates an inspection of the spatial environment, which appears to be of equal significance to the film's account of a day in the life of Deniz, the female protagonist. It is the kind of city film to which Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's description applies: "films in which the city as it is acts as a conditioning factor on the fiction precisely by its recalcitrance and its inability to be subordinated to the demands of the narrative. The city becomes a protagonist, but unlike the human characters it is not a fictional one."[542] Even though *Der schöne Tag* is very much centred on the human character, and can therefore be considered a 'monocular' film (Deniz is present in every single sequence),[543] the heroine's flânerie, her strolls and rides, give Arslan the opportunity to show various locations of the city.[544] The extended display of the protagonist's pathways, moreover, gives the film its particular flow, a rhythm oscillating between movement and stillness (see chapter 3). As Arslan has explained,

> Es war klar, daß die Wege von Deniz durch die Stadt eine wichtige Rolle spielen, daß man sie dabei begleiten und daß dies für den Rhythmus des Films ausschlaggebend sein würde. Mir gefällt es zu zeigen, wie sich jemand von einem Ort zum anderen bewegt. Die Wege sind keine tote Zeit.[545]

[542] Nowell-Smith, "Cities: Real and Imagined," 104.
[543] Term used by director-writer Paul Schrader.
[544] There are several predecessors of Berlin films with protagonists wandering through the city, of which the extremely long walk of the young protagonist through the ruins of Berlin at the end of Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1947) arguably represents the most famous example. On the one hand, the walk in Rossellini's film through the empty and damaged city renders sensible the boy's despair and solitariness within a hostile environment. But this sequence is also a document of a real place, of Berlin directly after the war. In addition to Rossellini's rubble film, Wim Wenders's first feature-length, *Summer in the City* (1970) is worth mentioning here. More than any of the directors of the New German Cinema, Wenders was concerned with landscapes and characters' motions. *Summer in the City* consists of several tracking shots which depict the male protagonist, recently released from prison, tramping through the wintery cityscapes of Munich and Berlin. The long solitary city walks, underscored by extra-diegetic music from the *Kinks* as well as the eponymous song by *The Lovin' Spoonful*, appear to embody the character's alienation. By displaying the protagonist on his strolls, on the other hand, Wenders's film makes the city, as Sabine Nessel has suggested, "auf eine physische Art greifbar." Nessel, *Kino und Ereignis*, 147.
[545] Thomas Arslan in Seidel, "Interview mit Thomas Arslan."

Figure 27 / 28: **OPENING UP THE SPATIAL SURROUNDINGS**

Arslan's appreciation for passageways, and his insistence that they should not be regarded as 'dead time,' dissociates itself strongly from the practice in mainstream cinema to cut out everything that has no function for the narrative. In these sequences of passage clearly manifests itself the Berlin School directors' preference for observation

over narration, their tendency to integrate non-dramatic and apparently insignificant elements into the stories, a strategy that goes hand in hand with deceleration. Walking scenes, in particular, as Matthew Flanagan suggests, correspond to the de-dramatisation of what has been labelled slow cinema:

> The minimal narrative structure of contemporary slow cinema is predominantly achieved by a process of direct reduction, a sustained emptying out of deeply entrenched dramatic elements […]. This form of de-dramatisation has its roots in European modernist cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, where emotional restraint began to suppress dramatic incident and the themes of alienation, isolation and boredom usurped the weight of familiar conflict. An aesthetic of slow exaggerates this tendency toward de-dramatisation, draining emotional distance and narrative obfuscation even further by extending the stretches of *temps mort* and subordinating non-events to extended duration within the shot. One direct factor of influence stems from the modernist introduction of a "cinema of walking" […]. The time afforded to the mere act of walking signifies a rupture in the organisation of drama, and it assumes an even more prominent position in the contemporary cinema.[546]

Gespenster: Framing Berlin as a Non-Place

Christian Petzold's *Gespenster*, too, provides us with an experience in which we see and hear Berlin's quotidian spaces anew. While Petzold's previous stories are largely located in provincial towns—Leverkusen and Wolfsburg, among others—, *Gespenster* is Petzold's first feature located in Germany's capital, which is also the director's residence since 1981. Most of the film takes place in and around Potsdamer Platz, one of Berlin's most prominent places, located almost halfway between the city's Eastern and Western centres. Famous in the 1920s as the city's central place of amusement, culture and entertainment, and incorporating numerous distinguished cabaret and theatre venues, Potsdamer Platz became a wasteland in the decades of the city's separation, situated as it was in close proximity to the Wall. It was re-built in the late 1990s, following American models, and now functions largely as a commercial area, including a shopping mall, eateries as well as several headquarters and branches of national and international companies.

[546] Matthew Flanagan, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," *16:9* 6, no. 29 (November 2008).

In his insightful introduction to Petzold's work, Jaimey Fisher draws attention to the importance of location settings for the director's approach, and suggests that *Gespenster* "confirms the centrality of space to his cinema."[547] In contrast to the majority of Petzold's films, which—much more strongly than those of his Berlin School fellows—rely on a plot, regularly borrowed from crime stories and/or genre films, *Gespenster* can be characterised as an observation of characters within space. In fact, Petzold has described the endeavour of *Gespenster* as a post-plot film, in which space assumes the role of the plot, suggesting connections between the ghostly status of the film's setting and the protagonists: "Ich möchte die Welt nach dem Plot erzählen. […] Wir haben uns eine Woche lang getroffen und unterhalten über diese Geschichten, die im Film dann vorbei sind, und über den Potsdamer Platz—auch dessen Geschichte ist vorbei."[548] One major influence for Petzold with relation to the location was Joel Sternfeld's *On this Site: Landscape in Memoriam*, a collection of photographs displaying empty spaces in the United States where some time ago an act of violence has taken place, each of them accompanied only with a very brief description of what has happened. Although not visible in the images, the empty sites, Petzold argues, still bear indications of the past, at least in the viewer's imagination. The same could be said about the locations of *Gespenster*, which hint at a history that is not always as easily detectable as in the depiction of Nina in front of the Martin-Gropius building, which was damaged in the Second World War.

Yet despite Petzold's interest in the aftershock of events, the film is less preoccupied with the history of Potsdamer Platz but rather with its exemplary contemporary status, a commercially owned public space, which in many ways seems to be representative of both the architecture and the use of space in late-capitalist societies. "Against the historical ghost usually invoked in discussing Potsdamer Platz" as Jaimey Fisher has suggested, "Petzold conjures instead ghosts created by the processes and practices of the contemporary world. Like these non-places, his ghosts are oblivious to history, no matter how proximate or relevant—the private interests of these spectral characters downplay or overwhelm any engagement with Berlin's public histories."[549]

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[547] Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 87.
[548] Christian Petzold in Susan Vahabzadeh and Fritz Göttler, "Karneval der Seelen: Plot oder Welt - ein Gespräch mit Christian Petzold," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 15, 2005.
[549] Jaimey Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 89.

Throughout Petzold's work, we can identify a concern with the sort of places and spaces that tend to reflect the contemporary condition of the human being in late-modern capitalist societies. Locations in Petzold's films are often of transitory nature, and thus closely related to notions of non-places (Augé) or abstract spaces (Lefebvre). It is therefore not surprising that the hotel, which may be considered the symptomatic non-place, appears in almost all of Petzold's films. On the one hand, these filmic inspections of hotels and other anonymous spaces can be seen as a form of spatial critique. Yet, as various commentators have observed, Petzold's (and other Berlin School directors') approaches to such non-places are more ambiguous, as the films draw attention not only to the locations' alienating character but also show that they can nevertheless be experienced (or imagined) as meaningful habitats.

Strange familiarity

Like Schanelec's and Arslan's films, Petzold's *Gespenster*, though mainly set in central areas of the city—the Tiergarten, Berlin's wooded central park, and Potsdamer Platz, an area with a chequered history which is now largely used commercially—, does not highlight Berlin's iconicity and referentiality. In fact, Petzold's framing of these locations clearly works against recognisability. For instance, when the French couple drives by the Siegessäule, a further famous landmark of the city, we only get a glimpse of the monument's less identifiable base rather than the actual column with the statue of Victoria on the top, and this familiar site is even kept outside the frame in the following shot when Nina and Toni have breakfast at a café located vis-à-vis the Siegessäule.[550] Particularly the area around Potsdamer Platz is defamiliarised by the absence of familiar views of its modern corporate towers or the Sony-Center, and instead largely framed as a non-identifiable place—in Deleuze's terms, an any-space-whatever—, a deserted urban landscape and 'home' of hotels, chain stores and less specific residential buildings. Apart from the absence of iconic buildings, the de-familiarisation effect results from the strong fragmentation of space, the rather narrow framing and obstructing views,

[550] Andrew Webber has spotted the signpost of the Victory Column, which during the breakfast scene becomes only briefly visible in the top left corner of the frame, yet as another evidence for the film's topographical opacity, not the entire name but only 'gessäule' is displayed. See Andrew J. Webber, "Topographical Turns: Recasting Berlin in Christian Petzold's Gespenster," in *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2011), 81.

techniques which not only hamper the spatial orientation but also render the environment strange (Fig. 29 / 30).

FIGURE 29 / 30: FRAMING BERLIN AS A NON-PLACE

This strategy dissociates itself from the common practice of establishing locations by means of wide shots. As Petzold has explained his negative attitude towards such postcard displays of places,

> Ich mag es nicht, wenn filmische Orte erst mal in der Totale aufgenommen werden wie für eine Postkarte. Der Ort muss doch mit der Inszenierung zu tun haben! Ich möchte die Orte so aufnehmen, dass man mit einer gewissen Beunruhigung spürt: Das kenne ich vage von irgendwo her. Doch die Koordinaten müssen nicht genau festgelegt sein.[551]

[551] Christian Petzold in Anke Westphal, "Unsere lebenden Toten," *Berliner Zeitung*, September 15, 2005.

What Petzold emphasises here is in fact a two-fold approach: a way of dealing with locations that makes them appear simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Or, as critic Georg Seeßlen has put it: "Man sieht etwas, das man jeden Tag sieht und von dem man im gleichen Moment bemerkt, dass man es nie gesehen hat."[552]

The strange familiarity derives, moreover, from the interplay between these non-places and the nearby Tiergarten. Petzold makes use of the natural site and the deserted urban landscapes around Potsdamer Platz in a way that evokes an atmosphere between dream and reality and thus renders the well-known centre of Berlin unfamiliar. Even though the city is marked by the current socioeconomic situation—as in one depiction of the group of low-paid workers, including the female protagonist, at the beginning of the film—, we experience its large central park as a *Märchenwald* through the film's allusive employment of fairy tale motives. This allusiveness is intensified, only seemingly paradoxically, by the film's adherence to the material world; "so erhält die Physis dieses Parks," as Cristina Nord has aptly observed, "erhalten die Baumfronten, die Grasflächen, die Teiche und Sträucher eine große Präsenz, und zugleich steckt genau darin die Möglichkeit einer Aufladung in Richtung Fiktion. Je mehr Körperlichkeit der Tiergarten in den Bildern […] gewinnt, umso eher kann er zum Märchenwald werden."[553]

Rather than functioning merely as a representation of the actual location, the images and sounds from the Tiergarten render the setting of the film, the German capital, uncanny and strange. This 'fantasy effect' is emphasised, on the visual level, by the use of steadicam, and on the acoustic level, by the highly amplified ambient sound of the (directly recorded) wind in the leaves. "Der Tiergarten hat eine Akustik," Petzold explains, "die ich noch nirgendwo auf der Welt vernommen habe. Die Stadt ist wahnsinnig nah und gleichzeitig wahnsinnig weit weg."[554] The film highlights this ambiguity, alluding in some shots to the impression of the park's uncultivated remoteness while exposing, in other scenes, its location in the midst of a metropolitan city. Here, again, it is the rather narrow framing, as well as the fluent passages between the park and its urban surroundings, that hampers the spectator's spatial orientation. The film's clinging to the concrete (visual and sonic) materiality of locations as well as the allusive framing "verwandeln nicht nur diesen Park," as critic Martina Knoben has

[552] Seeßlen, "Gegen die Verhältnisse."
[553] Nord, "Notizen zur Berliner Schule."
[554] Christian Petzold in Nord, "'Mit geschlossenen Augen hören.'"

pointed out, "auch andere alltägliche Orte […] wie ein Straßencafé oder ein H&M werden zu magischen, mythischen Räumen."[555] The magic mysteriousness of these quotidian spaces also raises questions about the film's temporality; the German capital may be perceived, as Roger F. Cook et al. have suggested, as "partly today's Berlin, insofar as it is under construction, but […] also tomorrow's postindustrial city, its urban landscape a desert."[556] As a consequence, Berlin's status (and our contemporary condition) is held in abeyance and therefore very much open to the spectator's imagination.

Strolling around with (female) characters

In the previous chapter, I described the female protagonists of *Marseille*, *Der schöne Tag* and *Gespenster* as Bressonian figures who share an emotional opacity. But it turns out that Sophie, Deniz and Nina (with Toni, her temporary companion) have even more in common; all of them wander (and commute) through urban space. (Svenja, the female protagonist in Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt*, can also be described as a drifter). The camera accompanies the (in the case of the films mentioned above) female protagonists on their walks and journeys, and in so doing, renders sensible their encounters and relations with the urban environment. Thus, the films of Schanelec, Arslan and Petzold provide us with a twofold experience of space; not only do they reveal the spatial environment, they also confront us with the protagonists' particular ways of experiencing such environment.

According to Kristina Trolle and Fred Truninger, cinema by its very nature is capable of producing a sensory experience of space. Walking, in particular, as Trolle and Truninger further suggest, is the most human form of movement, which provides a direct and bodily experience of the spatial surroundings:

> Landschaften begegnet man schon wegen ihres Maßstabs wegen am besten in Bewegung. Sie müssen mit dem eigenen Körper ergangen werden, um ihre volle Wirkung entfalten zu können. Das Gehen ist dabei zwar die langsamste, doch gleichzeitig wohl die der menschlichen Lebensform ursprünglichste Möglichkeit, größere landschaftliche Räume körperlich zu erfassen. Man nimmt die

[555] Martina Knoben, "Gespenster: Ein neuer Film von Christian Petozld," *epd Film* 9 (2005): 36.
[556] Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, and Brad Prager, "Introduction: The Berlin School–Under Observation," in *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema*, ed. Roger F. Cook et al. (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 13.

> Umgebung […] über die eigene Anstrengung bei der Fortbewegung als Materialität und psychisch-physische Anstrengung wahr.[557]

Even though Trolle and Truninger refer here to landscapes in the narrower sense, their notion of walking as an embodied experience of space can easily be applied to urban landscapes. Thus, the characters' movements in the films of Arslan, Petzold and Schanelec are crucial insofar as the physicality of walking renders sensible the materiality of locations, and in so doing, creates a bodily perception of space in the spectator.[558] In this way, the films also draw attention to the fact that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product,"[559] as Henri Lefebvre famously claimed in his observations on the constructedness of space. For Lefebvre, space is thus not be conceived in abstract or neutral terms but is rather produced and transformed by "lived experience": "Space appears as a realm of objectivity, yet it exists in a social sense only for activity—for (and by virtue of) walking or riding on horseback, or travelling by car, boat, train, plane, or some other means."[560] Applying this idea to cinema, Giuliana Bruno suggests that film can be seen "as a form of mapping, inscribed in a movement in perspectival space that tends away from perspectivism and toward a tactile way of space. 'Viewed' as this particular architectonics—a spatial navigation—the motion of moving pictures is revealed as an embodiment of space that approaches the feeling of the haptic."[561] Bruno terms her haptic interpretation of cinematic travelling as "site-seeing" (instead of sightseeing), which she explains as follows:

> Siteseeing signals a shift in film theory away from its focus on sight towards constructing a theory of site—a cartography, that is, of film's position in the terrain of spatial arts and practices. [….] Many aspects of the moving image—for example, the acts of inhabiting and traversing space—could not be explained within the framework of theories of the eye. Locked within a fixed gaze, the film spectator was turned into a *voyeur*. Speaking of siteseeing implies that, because of film's spatio-corporeal kinetics, the spectator is a *voyageur* rather than a *voyeur*. Through this shift to *voy(ag)eur*, my aim is to reclaim female mobility, arguing, from the position of a (film) *voyageuse*, that film is modern cartography. It is a mobile map.[562]

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[557] Kristina Trolle and Fred Truninger, "Komplexe Landschaft," in *moving landscapes: Landschaft und Film*, ed. Barbara Pichler and Andrea Pollach (Wien: Synema, 2006), 60.

[558] There are various layers of movement, as Thomas Schick has observed: "Von der Bewegung der Figuren durch einen topographischen Raum über Bewegung im Innenleben der Figuren bis hin zur Bewegung in der Wahrnehmung des Zuschauers." Schick, "Stillstand in Bewegung," 82.

[559] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

[560] Ibid., 192.

[561] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 180.

[562] Giulina Bruno, "Site-Seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image," *Wide Angle* 19, no. 4 (1997): 9–10.

What Bruno suggest here is that the filmic experience of space cannot be fully understood by the sense of vision. Bruno's notion of the film spectator as a traveller—a voyageur/voyaguese—can be traced back to Kracauer's account of embodied spectatorship, in which he compares the activity of film viewing with flânerie:

> And how do films gratify the isolated individual's longings? He recalls the nineteenth-century flaneur (with whom he has otherwise little in common) in his susceptibility to the transient real-life phenomena that crowd the screen. According to the testimony available, it is their flux which affects him most strongly. Along with the fragmentary happenings incidental to them, these phenomena—taxi cabs, buildings, passers-by, inanimate objects, faces—presumably stimulate his senses and provide him with stuff for dreaming. Bar interiors suggest strange adventures; improvised gatherings hold out the promise of fresh human contacts; sudden shifts of scene are pregnant with unforeseeable possibilities.[563]

As we can see, both Bruno and Kracauer draw attention to cinema's affinity with mobility and travelling, as well as the strong sensory effects this cinematic flânerie has on the spectator. But whereas Kracauer's conception of spectatorship, though understood as bodily and kinetic, was still centred on the act of viewing, Bruno's understanding of film as a tactile spatial experience (similar to architecture) clearly problematizes the strong focus on sight in film scholarship.[564] Moreover, Bruno genders Kracauer's (gender-blind) notion of the film spectator-flâneur, arguing "for the haptic as a feminist strategy of reading space."[565]

Although the flâneur—a stroller and observer of and within urban, metropolitan space—has been predominantly seen as a male figure, his female counterpart—the flâneuse—appears to be of particular significance in relation to the female urban strollers who are the protagonists in the films of Arslan, Schanelec and Petzold. But despite the directors' shared preoccupation with mundane cityscapes and their concentration on female protagonists, there is a fundamental difference in relation to

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[563] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 170. The figure of the flâneur can be traced back to 19th century literature, but was developed into a heuristic concept at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in Walter Benjamin's account of 19th century Paris, drawing on essays by French poet Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin and Kracauer, both well-known for their explorations of city life and their extensive writings on urban phenomena, can be regarded as flâneurs themselves. More than Benjamin, Kracauer offered a socioeconomic understanding of the flâneur, emphasising its bourgeois role, as distinguished from the upper-class dandy and the lower middle-class (student) bohemian. See Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," *New Left Review* 191, no. 1 (February 1992): 95.

[564] It needs to be stressed, however, that Bruno's critique was not directed at the concentration on the visual in early/classical film theory but especially addressed the fixation with the gaze in Lacanian psychoanalytical approaches.

[565] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 16.

the characters' (un)familiarity with the spatial surroundings in Arslan's and Schanelec's films, which also changes the way in which we perceive these places and spaces. In *Der schöne Tag*, Deniz moves through a city she is very much acquainted with. Berlin is her hometown, and her movements are of quotidian character insofar as she knows the spaces because she walks regularly through them. The everydayness of this experience is represented by the protagonist's purposeful motions, a flow which the film sets out to highlight on various occasions by the camera's panning. In these panning shots, Deniz first walks towards the camera and then continues on her way away from it, which moreover reveals a panorama of mundane urban spaces.

Sophie's situation in *Marseille* is quite different from Deniz's. She has just arrived in Marseille; the city is completely new for her. Unlike Deniz, who does not pay much attention to the familiar spatial surroundings, Sophie thus carefully observes the unknown city. As she moves rather tentatively through an unfamiliar environment, the observational camera accompanies her in a similar way, mostly from a certain distance, but sometimes we get closer to her, with the result that the protagonist's cautious exploration of the city becomes even more apparent. More than Deniz, Sophie can be considered a flâneuse, an observer of the city; her flânerie is emphasised, moreover, by the fact that she is a photographer.[566]

Like the protagonists of Schanelec's *Marseille* and Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, the characters in Petzold's *Gespenster* are female strollers in the city. However, unlike Sophie in *Marseille* and Deniz in *Der schöne Tag*, Nina and Toni can hardly be considered flâneuses, immersed but detached observers of the city. Whereas Sophie explores the French city with awareness, a consequence of both her role as a stranger and her occupation as a photographer, while Deniz, who constantly exchanges looks with strangers, instead allows her eyes to rest on her fellow human beings, the two young women in *Gespenster* wander around Postsdamer Platz without paying attention to the spatial environment.[567] This disregard can be seen as a result of their ghostly status,

[566] Susan Sontag has described the photographer as "an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world 'picturesque.'" Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), 55.

[567] The drifting of the two female nomads in *Gespenster*, moreover, is contrasted with the car drives of the French couple (particularly Françoise) in their BMW convertible, a detail which not only draws attention to the characters' different social backgrounds but also provides us with a distinctive form of movement and thus a further way of experiencing space. In fact, questions of mobility are a continuous

which arises, in turn, from their precarious economic situation. As Jaimey Fisher has correctly observed, "Nina and Toni wander around these historically overburdened spaces without even acknowledging, let alone engaging, with the many historical *Schaustellen* (viewing sights) that have been staged for visitors. They have, instead, other preoccupations, like food, clothes and a coming casting call."[568] Ghosts are no flâneurs.

Christoph Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt*: A World of Surfaces

Mother-of-Pearl. *** To find a surface that also reflects what lies beneath.
CHRISTOPH HOCHHÄUSLER[569]

Like Petzold's *Gespenster*, Christoph Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt*, the sixth and last film of this study, is concerned with symptomatic spaces of our contemporary capitalist societies: the glassy surfaces of corporate business towers. As we will see, *Unter dir die Stadt*, the director's third full-length feature following *Milchwald* (2003) and *Falscher Bekenner* (2005), differs in its approach to the material world from the films that I have discussed so far.

Christoph Hochhäusler, born in 1972 in Munich, has contributed more than any other director associated with the Berlin School to the public discourse about questions of filmmaking, and the role cinema can and should play in our time (and he has therefore been quoted several times in this thesis). In 1997, as a result of disappointment with the lack of theoretical reflection in his course of study at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen München (HFF, Munich Academy for Film and Television), Hochhäusler, alongside other graduates—Benjamin Heisenberg, Jens Börner, Sebastian Kutzli—, co-founded the film magazine *Revolver*. The core of this bi-annual print magazine is made up by interviews with and single essays by international filmmakers—among them, many Berlin School directors—, which aim to discuss approaches to filmmaking outside

concern in Petzold's cinema, and here particularly the significance of the car in Germany. Nearly all of Petzold's films feature car drives, yet his way of filming such scenes is quite particular; recurrently, the driver (or co-driver) is framed narrowly, while the passing landscapes beyond the window are blurred (out of focus). By these means, Petzold seems to emphasise the separation from the environment, and the degree of seclusion in the experience of car driving.

[568] Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 89.

[569] Hochhäusler, "Right to Reply."

of, or in opposition to, mainstream cinema. In addition to the magazine *Revolver*, Hochhäusler has his own blog, *Parallelfilm*, where he shares his views on a variety of aspects of filmmaking and the medium film, reflections which frequently point to cinema's revelatory potential, its role in engaging with the world and creating an experience of reality. The main question exercising Hochhäusler seems to be how we can nowadays get hold of reality and reveal the current state of things.[570] "The goal," Hochhäusler writes, "is a cinema that makes life more intense. Every film has to let itself be measured against life. It could be said: A film is an instrument in the process of producing reality. It is therefore part of a social context. The basic question is: What is real? Each attempt at replying is a personal commitment."[571] Hochhäusler here draws attention to the (trans)formative elements in cinema's ability to reveal reality (an attitude which involves reservations about the medium's documentary qualities.)

Two blog posts by Hochhäusler are of special interest for this chapter as they highlight the importance of spatial surroundings and cinema's ability to present them in new ways. In the entry "Berlin filmen," Hochhäusler, who was at that point developing his film *Die Lügen der Sieger* (*The Lies of the Victors*, 2014), raises the question of how to film the city of Berlin:

> Mein aktuelles Projekt […] soll in und mit Berlin spielen […]. Die Frage, wie man diese Straßen filmen kann oder muss, beschäftigt mich jeden Tag. Es macht auch deshalb so viel Spaß, darüber nachzudenken, weil ich das Gefühl habe, die Stadt sei gewissermassen unterbelichtet. Natürlich gibt es zahllose Filme, die hier spielen, in jüngerer Zeit auch deshalb, weil Berlin Mittelpunkt des deutschen

[570] Ulrich Peltzer, a critically acclaimed German writer and the co-author of *Unter dir die Stadt*, has articulated his modernist-realist idea of literature and the arts as follows: "Alles gleich, alles anders, wäre vielleicht die Losung, von der man auszugehen hätte bei einem erneuten Versuch […], der Wirklichkeit 'habhaft' zu werden, um sie in ihrer Unabweisbarkeit schildern zu können, was heißt: sie sich erzählen zu lassen. Dass eine 'komplette Darstellung,' ein mimetisches Abbild, das Vollständigkeit schon in seinem Programm beansprucht, zum Scheitern verurteilt ist, sollte nicht erläutert werden müssen, zu disparat, zu prekär, zu mobil zeigt sich heute jede Realität, die wir für fiktionstauglich halten; die es nichtsdestotrotz fiktional zu bearbeiten und in Literatur, Film, bildende Kunst zu verwandeln gilt, um sie ästhetisch begreifen und loswerden zu lernen. Vielleicht bedeutet 'habhaft werden' genau dies—eine absurd vorläufig bleibende, immer vom Verschwinden bedrohte Wirklichkeit sich (wieder) anzueignen, indem man sie erzählend von sich selber berichten lässt. Ihr eine Geschichte unter so vielen anderen Geschichten gibt. Einen peripheren Anfang mittendrin." Ulrich Peltzer, *Angefangen wird mittendrin: Frankfurter Poetikvorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2011), 33–34. Even though Peltzer here refers to aesthetic apprehension of reality at large, the similarities to Hochhäusler's modernist-realist idea of cinema are obvious.

[571] Hochhäusler, "Right to Reply."

> Films geworden ist […], aber trotzdem fallen mir nur wenige aktuelle Filme ein, die Berlin auch meinen.[572]

Even though Hochhäusler here refers to Berlin, one can assume that he asked himself a similar question regarding the framing of Frankfurt in preparation for *Unter dir die Stadt*. In another blog entry, he criticises Abdellatif Kechiche's *La Vie d'Adèle—Chapitres 1 & 2* (*Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, 2013), the winner of the Palme d'Or in 2013, for, among other aspects, not taking seriously cinematic space: "Das ganze wird im schmalen Vokabular einer Fernsehdokumentation gefilmt: eine aktionszentrierte Handkamera, die an den Protagonisten klebt, immer nah oder halbnah, ohne weitere Modulation des filmischen Raumes."[573]

As we can see from these commentaries, Hochhäusler is concerned with both the choice of locations and the question of how to present them. In fact, it was not least the medium's spatial character that made him become interested in cinema in the first place. As Hochhäusler explains in an interview, he grew up without television, and the very few encounters he had with the medium consisted in family visits to the cinema for Disney films. He discovered his passion for film at the age of 17 or 18. Having also drawn from an early age, Hochhäusler desired for a long time to become a painter, but at the age of 16 turned towards architecture, "not the least of which because I was interested in finding an art form that had a direct purchase on the real world."[574] From 1993 to 1995, Hochhäusler studied architecture at the Technische Universität in Berlin, where he had moved for his community service, but dropped out when he realised "dass das, was mich an der Architektur interessiert, auch im Film zu verwirklichen ist. Und das, was mich an der Architektur nicht interessiert, im Film nicht vorkommt—oder in anderer Form,"[575] and in 1996, after several assistantships in film productions, he eventually started to study film direction in Munich.

Having abandoned his studies of architecture, Hochhäusler, then, extended his concern with space into his films. As Hochhäusler has suggested, cinema and architecture, on an abstract level, share a kinship insofar as both can be considered

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[572] Christoph Hochhäusler, "Berlin filmen," *Revolver-Blog*, May 5, 2012, http://revolver-film.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/berlin-filmen.html.

[573] Christoph Hochhäusler, "La Faute à Kechiche," *Parallel Film*, December 27, 2013, http://parallelfilm.blogspot.co.uk/2013_12_01_archive.html.

[574] Christoph Hochhäusler in Abel, "Tender Speaking."

[575] Christoph Hochhäusler in Johannes Prokopp, "Interview mit Christoph Hochhäusler," *Movie-College*, https://www.movie-college.de/filmschule/regie/interviews/christoph-hochhaeusler?tmpl=component&print=1&page=.

spatial expressions that aim to picture life and create different models of the world.[576] This shared preoccupation is especially true with respect to the work of Hochhäusler; indeed, we can regard his cinematic attitude as architectural because of his films' attentiveness to social and architectonic space, their attempt to render visible and sensible human experience of the spatial environment. The director's spatial approach manifests itself, moreover, by his conviction "that cinema works by means of the gaze. The gaze is something that goes into the room. The image, in contrast, is two-dimensional."[577]

Already in Hochhäusler's first two feature films, *Milchwald* and *Falscher Bekenner*, the director's engagement with the spatial environment is clearly discernible. Whereas *Milchwald*, a modern Hansel and Gretel story centred around a family living in a house under construction, allows us to observe extensively the deserted landscapes of the borderland with Poland, *Falscher Bekenner* examines the spaces between the young protagonist's single-family home in a suburban neighbourhood and the nearby *Autobahn*, the German non-place *par excellence*. Following the rather peripheral settings—suburbs and wastelands—of *Milchwald* and *Falscher Bekenner*, *Unter dir die Stadt* takes us to the financial district of Frankfurt. In this film, social and architectonic space becomes even more essential, by means of both the camera's adherence to surfaces and what we may call the spatialization of human experience.

Similarly to the other films discussed in this study, *Unter dir die Stadt*, which premiered in Cannes in the section 'Un certain regard' in 2010—the director's second invitation to the festival after *Falscher Bekenner*—sets out to disclose the world we live in. Yet, *Unter dir die Stadt* distinguishes itself from what I have called the micro-approaches to urban space of Schanelec's *Marseille*, Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* and Petzold's *Gespenster* insofar as it pursues a bigger objective, namely to shed light on present forms of capitalism and the current human condition (in Western societies). Hochhäusler's film reveals a sphere of our daily (economic) realities we are less familiar with, a realm which not many (Art cinema) directors have approached, even though its

[576] "Christoph Hochhäusler on Architecture," *Cine-Fils*, http://www.cine-fils.com/interviews/christoph-hochhaeusler.html.
[577] Christoph Hochhäusler in Abel, "Tender Speaking."

practices and ways of thinking have a strong impact on our everyday lives: the world of finance capitalism.[578]

Hochhäusler's approach differs from the other films, moreover, by relying on a more classical and metaphorical narrative; in fact, it provides us with an almost conventional point of departure. On the surface, *Unter dir die Stadt* can be described as a story of love and/or desire between Roland Cordes (Robert Hunger-Bühler), a successful managing director recently awarded 'banker of the year,' and Svenja Steve (Nicolette Krebitz), the wife of one of the firm's 'high potentials.' When Svenja becomes the object of his desire, Cordes arranges for Svenja's husband, Oliver (Marc Waschke) to be promoted to lead the company's Asia office in Indonesia (where he is sent without knowing of the danger of the situation: his predecessor was kidnapped and brutally killed).

The starting point for Hochhäusler's film was the biblical tale of King David and Bathsheba. In this Old Testamentary story, Israelite King David seduces a married woman named Bathsheba and makes her pregnant. After a failed attempt at camouflage, David uses his power to command the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and soldier in the royal army, by isolating him from his troop. The legend about the monarch who makes use of his discretionary power for reasons of love and/or desire was the basic idea for the screenplay, for which Hochhäusler teamed up with Ulrich Peltzer. The scriptwriters asked themselves who would be the present-day equivalent for the biblical all-powerful ruler, a contemporary 'master of the universe,' and came up with the idea of a story around a high-ranking banker, who they thought would come closest to the monarch's omnipotence.

Yet, this initial scenario is only the starting point for the film's dispassionate examination of the environment of investment banking. Even though we may perceive *Unter dir die Stadt* in the context of the financial crisis, which in 2008 arose from the collapse of the US-housing bubble, and its catastrophic global aftermath, the films' concern clearly goes beyond an attempt to come to terms with these events.[579] Since the logic after which finance capitalism and its actors operate is understood as essentially abstract (in comparison with the 'real,' that is production-orientated,

[578] Of course, in the context of the Berlin School one needs to mention Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007), which is similarly aimed at rendering visible and sensible varieties of finance capitalism.

[579] As Hochhäusler has explained, he had the idea for the film prior to the outset of the financial crisis of 2008.

economy), a filmmaker willing to grasp this environment faces the challenge to find ways of visualising this abstraction. Hochhäusler's film seems to be less concerned with an authentic portrayal of this milieu but rather aims to render visible and sensible this world(view) and the overall consequences which arise from its practices and ways of thinking, a world of fictionalised (thus unreliable) narratives and abstract (thus disembodied) experiences for which the finance industry is only the most extreme example.

Critic Ekkehard Knörer has described the approach of *Unter dir die Stadt* as "eine Versuchsanordnung mit klinisch interessiertem Blick aufs System, auf Machenschaften und Gebaren, auf die Gesten der Sprache, das Spiel und die Regung der Mienen, die Bewegung von Körpern in Räumen."[580] Hochhäusler's film aims to capture the sphere of finance capitalism, apart from the characters' motions, mainly through the spaces and buildings where the protagonists reside, which confronts us not only with the ambiguous material texture of Frankfurt's steel-and-glass architecture but also reveals how spaces and buildings shape people's lives and experiences.

Frankfurt, the country's largest financial centre (and the second-largest in Europe), is the only German city with a proper skyline, and is therefore nicknamed Mainhattan (a portmanteau term composed of Main, the river on which the city is situated, and Manhattan). Yet, Hochhäusler refuses to show us the overfamiliar skyline of the city, 'landmark Frankfurt,' which is displayed as a background in nearly every (television) film located in Frankfurt. Alasdair King has pointed to the substantial differences between common representations of finance capitalism in mainstream cinema and the media, and Hochhäusler's (as well as Petzold's) counter-approach of rendering visible this environment. The unfamiliarity of the images presented in *Unter dir die Stadt*, King suggests, results from the fact that Hochhäusler "moves away from trading screens, skyscraper panoramas, the gridded city below, the personification of systemic catastrophe, the imperiled family as refuge, crisis as morality tale. There are no real-time electronic rows of figures or ticker tape scroll, familiar indices of financial meltdown." [581]

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[580] Ekkehard Knörer, "Steigerungsformen der Macht," *die tageszeitung*, March 30, 2011, www.taz.de/!5123751/.

[581] Alasdair King, "The Recontextualisation of Capital: The Berlin School and Filming Finance—Introductory Remarks on The City Below" (German Screen Studies Network Symposium—The Return of the Real: Realism and Everyday Life in Contemporary German-language Film, King's College London, July 4, 2013).

Hochhäusler's film is an examination of a location and its architecture; the cityscape of Frankfurt, and especially its financial district, is a protagonist of at least equal importance to the human characters. In fact, no other Berlin School film shows the same interest in architecture and its impact on the human being; one need therefore to concur with Simon Rothöhler's suggestion that *Unter dir die Stadt* can be regarded as an "Architekturfilm,"[582] an approach clearly influenced by Antonioni's cinema, especially in his city films taking place in Milan, *La notte* (1961), and Rome, *L'eclisse* (1962). The impact of the city's business towers is rendered visible and sensible by the fact that they appear in nearly every single shot displaying the outer city, often highlighting their sheer magnitude in relation to the surroundings, while the somehow claustrophobic effect of these images is emphasised by the near absence of street life.

While the spatial environment in *Unter dir die Stadt* is revealed in purely cinematic terms, Frankfurt is also addressed on a discursive level, mostly in relation to other places, which highlights the city's generic or global character, a (non-)place of global-acting financial institutions which, unlike production-based industries (at least in a prior stage of capitalism), are not dependent on an actual location. While Svenja's husband mentions the close resemblance between his current and previous workplaces in Frankfurt and Houston, Cordes refers to the complete indistinguishability of his London and Frankfurt offices (including even the same paintings), an observation at which Svenja remarks "Man ist immer schon da."[583] On the visual level, Frankfurt's status (at least its financial district) as a global city is emphasised by the concentration on mostly unidentifiable locations and areas.

Deceptive surfaces

Already in the very first images of the film, a prelude displayed between the opening credits, we are confronted with impersonal and disconnected perspectives of the city and its (post)modern architecture. Whereas in the initial two shots we are offered views

[582] Simon Rothöhler, "Eine umwegige Affäre," *Der Freitag*, March 30, 2011, https://www.freitag.de/autoren/siroth/eine-umwegige-affare.

[583] In addition, Frankfurt's character as a global city and white-collar banking centre is juxtaposed with Mannheim, an unglamorous nearby town, where Cordes takes Svenja pretending to show her the small apartment where he supposedly grew up, thinking that his faked working-class background as the son of a blue-collar worker at BASF, one of the world's largest chemical companies and a symbol of industrial capitalism, would make an impression on her. (In reality, not Cordes but the person recently killed in Indonesia grew up there. Cordes, on the other hand, as we and Svenja will learn later, was born into a rather wealthy family from Zurich, Switzerland.)

from an airplane hovering above the clouds (the land on the ground is hardly recognisable),[584] the following viewpoint stems from an ascending glass elevator, which takes us up over the rooftops of Frankfurt (except from the adjacent high-rises) and gives us a first sense of the altitude of the business towers and its distance to the city below. The film then cuts to street level, which adds low-key ambient sound of car traffic to the slightly mysterious score, composed by Benedikt Schiefer, which we have heard since the film started; here we get a glimpse of revolving glass entrance doors (presumably of one of the corporate skyscrapers), a surface which does not permit us to look into the building but only reflects the passing cars. In the next shot, the last of the film's introductory fragments, we are provided with a blurred sight of trees (while at the same time perceiving the rustle of the wind in their leaves), only to realise that we are dealing with reflections of the environment in a shop window, where the reflected trees merge with a dress displayed in the shop to a semi-abstract picture.

We cannot avoid considering the mirror imaging also in relation to our notions of reality, and therefore to questions of cinematic realism. It is precisely the leaves of a tree, an object which has been central in considerations of cinema's ability to capture pro-filmic reality, which is used in Hochhäusler's approach to point to the uncertain status of reality and (filmic) images. Among the films discussed in this study, Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt* is arguably less influenced by cinematic practices traditionally associated with (documentary) realism with respect to the use of camera, light and sound.[585] This does not mean that the other films are not constructed, yet images and sounds in Hochhäusler's film seem to be arranged more strongly to create or enhance certain effects, a compositional style which is also reflected by the use of production design. As Hochhäusler has explained,

> A major theme both in photography and production design was "reflection," which in practical terms means glass. Glass creates an illusionary effect—because the world seems close, but it is out of reach, out of touch. The way we

[584] Or perhaps, one just needs to be familiar with the area; critic Rüdiger Suchsland has recognised the Taunus, a low mountain range located northwest of Frankfurt, in this opening shot. Rüdiger Suchsland, "Amour Fou eines Managers," *critic.de*, May 16, 2010, http://www.critic.de/special/amour-fou-eines-managers-3145/. Both Marco Abel and Alasdair King have considered these aerial views as a reference to the opening sequence of Leni Riefenstahl's infamous Nazi-propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935). Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 189; King, "Recontextualisation of Capital."

[585] We could perhaps link *Unter dir die Stadt* to the "fusion of realism and modernism," which Hamish Ford has considered essential for the early 1960's films of Michelangelo Antonioni. Hamish Ford, "Hard Clarity, Vaporous Ambiguity: The Fusion of Realism and Modernism in Antonioni's Early 1960s Films," *Senses of Cinema* 74 (March 2015), http://sensesofcinema.com/2015/feature-articles/hard-clarity-vapo…sion-of-realism-and-modernism-in-antonionis-early-1960s-films-1/.

> create "reality" in our minds is closely connected with the activity of our hands. We verify with hands. Production designer Tim Pannen gave Roland's office an even more unreal feeling by using white carpets. They create this weightless feeling when you look down on the city from the 27th floor.[586]

The surface character of (post)modern glass-and-steel architecture, the relation between its supposed transparency (an assurance of the citizens' control of power) and factual opacity, is a recurrent motif throughout the film, as can be observed in the various shots of the corporate skyscrapers from the outside. In fact, these glassy 'palaces of corporate power' prove themselves extremely opaque to our gaze; rather than allowing us to see what is going on inside, they confront us mainly with reflections of the environment; we are thus left somehow staring at ourselves.

Let us consider one shot of the obscure façades of Frankfurt's business towers in greater detail. In the scene following the film's overture described above, Svenja Steve, the female protagonist, is briefly introduced as she impulsively follows a woman on the street (the *Zeil*, Frankfurt's well-known central shopping area), having spotted that they are wearing the same blouse. The film cuts to one of the top floors of a high-rise building, showing a group of businessmen (among them, Roland Cordes) who discuss during a lunch meeting the hostile takeover of a company, a scene which not only introduces Cordes, the film's male protagonist, but also familiarises us with the gestures, facial expressions and the German-English phraseology of Germany's (male) business executives. During their conversation, the camera closely observes the managers' facial expressions, yet some of the deliberately framed shots also make us aware of the environment behind the large window façade and the sheer altitude of the skyscraper. Indeed, it is particularly the vertical spatial relationship between the high-ranking bankers above and the city below which the film emphasises and to which the title, *Unter dir die Stadt*, already alludes. A number of shots throughout the film highlight the great distance between the top floors of the corporate towers, a distance to which the bank's managing directors are apparently accustomed and therefore do not notice anymore; some high-angle shots particularly seem to suggest their detachment from the city below, implying that they are literally out of touch with the 'real' world (Fig. 31 / 32).

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[586] Christoph Hochhäusler, "Comments from Christoph Hochhäusler," *Unter dir die Stadt press kit*.

FIGURE 31 / 32: THE CITY BELOW

After Cordes has expressed his support for the deal ("Es wird ein bisschen scheppern, aber probieren wir's"),[587] the camera cuts to a shot from an adjacent building, which abruptly changes our perspective from that of a close observer of the event to an outsider. From our new viewpoint, we can hardly make out the outline of the four businessmen inside the building (drinking a toast) since the opaque glass façade does not really allow us to see through the windows but rather provides us with strong reflections of the urban environment below (Fig. 33). The sudden spatial separation is

[587] We could say that in these opening sequences both main characters (who will eventually start an affair) are presented as players, though the kind of games someone like Cordes is playing does in fact have serious consequences (such as the loss of jobs).

also rendered sensible on the audible level as we are cut off from the conversation inside, and extra-diegetic music comes in again.

FIGURE 33: OPAQUE TRANSPARENCY

As we can see, Hochhäusler's film draws attention from the very beginning to the material texture of Frankfurt's non-transparent glass towers and confronts us with different perceptions of the city and its high-rise buildings, inhabited by the finance industry, viewpoints which often highlight the dividing lines of power inside/outside and above/below.[588] Marco Abel is therefore right in highlighting "how the film constantly positions its viewers to look."[589] This is achieved, apart from camera positioning and framing, by the contrastive linking of shots, as in the scene described above, a practice of montage (editor: Stefan Stabenow) we may call dialectical (and a manifestation of the film's formative elements, the construction and re-organisation of pro-filmic reality).

As already mentioned, Hochhäusler understands cinema as a (trans)formation of reality, a process which demands, as he suggests, the active involvement of the spectator (rather than facilitating their passive immersion): "Man muss die Welt verwandeln, um sie zur Kenntlichkeit zu entstellen. Eine Geschichte ist eine Metapher—also nicht einfach fertig, sondern auf den 'Übersetzer,' den Zuschauer angewiesen."[590]

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[588] The metaphorical component is sometimes overstressed; for instance, when the promotion prospects of Andre Lau (Van-Lam Vissay), another 'high-potential' in the department of Svenja's husband, is visualized by him going up the elevator.

[589] Abel, *Counter-Cinema*, 190.

[590] Christoph Hochhäusler in "Die Welt zur Kenntlichkeit entstellen: Ein Interview mit den Regisseuren Dominik Graf, Christoph Hochhäusler und Christian Petzold," *DasErste.de*, http://www.daserste.de/dreileben/allround_dyn~uid,6rdwspg7jn7hiq9l~cm.asp.

Hochhäusler's remark recalls Alexander Kluge's famous slogan that the actual film comes into being in the spectator's head. (In fact, Hochhäusler has mentioned Kluge as an important influence.) "Der Ausdruck," Kluge writes, "verdichtet sich nicht im Material selbst, sondern entsteht im Kopf des Zuschauers aus den Bruchstellen zwischen den filmischen Ausdruckselementen." [591] Kluge's emphasis on the viewer's active participation in the filmic process, however, should not be understood as a plea for open images, as elaborated in chapter 3, but forms part of his dialectical agenda (influenced by Eisenstein). Kluge's montage-based conception of counter-cinema stands in stark contrast to Kracauer's notion of the medium's redemptive potential, which originates from the confrontation with the ambiguous material world presented *within* a shot.

For this present study, the question is therefore how open the images (or the combination of images) in *Unter dir die Stadt* are; do they impose a particular understanding, or do they convey, in Kracauer's words, a multiplicity of possible meanings? It seems as if, with the high-angle shots and the arrangement of images, Hochhäusler intends to evoke specific associations in the spectator, as the question of power relations along the axis above/below and inside/outside is clearly emphasised. Moreover, the recurrent display of reflecting glass throughout the film, suggests a symbolic reading of the alleged (yet opaque) transparency. Considering the milieu portrayed in the film, these deceptive surfaces may be interpreted, as Cristina Nord has suggested, as a metaphor for the deceptions and delusions of prevailing neoliberal doctrines.

Hochhäusler appears to endorse such political readings. With respect to his feature *Milchwald*, Hochhäusler has stated that he "take[s] great pleasure in reading signs. For instance, the unfinished house in which the family lives, etc.: all of these are signs that the viewer is supposed to read and that one can and should read politically."[592] In this context, we can also understand Hochhäusler's aspirations "to find a surface that also reflects what lies beneath,"[593] as he has stated one of the aims of his

[591] Alexander Kluge in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste* (München: Hanser, 1980), 15.
[592] Christoph Hochhäusler in Abel, "Tender Speaking."
[593] Hochhäusler, "Right to Reply."

filmmaking.[594] By lingering on the glassy surfaces of both exterior and interior spaces, *Unter dir die Stadt* evokes a world of surfaces, and a reality that is difficult to grasp.

Yet notwithstanding the director's intentions and the symbolic or meaningful overtones of certain shots (or combination of shots), the film's material approach, its concentration on surfaces, opens up examinations of the spatial environment. Throughout the film, we are constantly confronted with displays of unidentified buildings and places, permitting us views from a great variety of angles and positions. These images provide us with an experience of the city's (post)modern architectural sites, which because of their allusive character gain importance in their own right; they may affect us regardless of the narrative and their possible meaning.

[594] Hochhäusler's concern with decipherable surfaces dissociates from Kracauer's emphasis in *Theory of Film* on the purely external and non-meaningful qualities of material phenomena (though it might be linked to the latter's analysis of "inconspicuous surface-level expressions" in the 1920s). In the opening paragraph of his essay "The mass ornament," Kracauer outlines his "epistemological agenda" (Gertrud Koch) as follows, "The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. Conversely, knowledge of this state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally. Kracauer, "Mass Ornament," 75.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the contemporaneity of Siegfried Kracauer's material aesthetics as developed in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, suggesting the book's ongoing relevance for the examination of contemporary realist filmmaking by looking closely at selected films associated with the Berlin School. As explained in the introduction and at the beginning of the first chapter, I have chosen my case studies for their strong adherence to the material world, which strikes me as making them ideally suited for discussions in relation to Kracauer's distinctive approach to film.

The first chapter aimed to introduce Kracauer's *Theory of Film*. Particularly, I emphasised the book's central argument for cinema's exclusive potential for (re-)experiences of physical reality. This claim, I have suggested, is based first, on the idea of photographic media's genuine relationship with reality and, second, on the sensory and somatic nature of film spectatorship. As I have shown moreover, the medium's revelatory power, its capacity to render visible the material world is understood by Kracauer not as simply given but as something that needs to be achieved; it entails a strong adherence to the material world on the part of the filmmaker.

The second chapter, too, was of an introductory nature: it focussed on familiarising us with a group of German directors who have become known as the Berlin School. By examining academic and journalistic writings on the film(maker)s and contextualising them both within German and world cinema, I have clarified my take on Berlin School cinema, suggesting that there can be observed a similar attitude to the material world across the otherwise distinctive works of the filmmakers: an attitude that moreover places their work in close proximity to the concerns of Kracauer.

Chapters 3 to 5 served the main purpose of this study: bringing together Kracauer's idea of cinema's redemptive potential to render visible the material world through contemporary realist filmmaking. Throughout the three chapters, the focus lay on the analysis of six films: Angela Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001), Christian Petzold's *Gespenster* (2005), Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (2006), Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002) and Christoph Hochhäusler's *Unter dir die Stadt* (2010). Aside from my film examinations, I took into account statements from the

directors in order to highlight their attitudes to the medium and its relation to the material world.

In the third chapter, I examined the Berlin School films' adherence to the material world with regard to their employment of camerawork, lighting and sound. First, I drew attention to the fact that Kracauer conceptualises physical reality as at once given and constructed (not only can it be recorded by the camera but it also needs to be revealed by cinematic techniques and devices). This two-fold (preserving and constructing) conception, I have suggested, is also reflected in the Berlin School films' approaches to the material world. Moreover, I have argued that the use of images and sounds by Schanelec, Arslan and Petzold can be characterised as both non-manipulative (in the recording process) and imaginative (in the filmmakers' employment of cinematic techniques and devices such as camerawork, framing and sound). By virtue of their combination of preserving and constructing elements, these films create ambiguous experiences of the visible and audible world, and thus support the associative qualities that are inherent in filmic images and sounds.

The ambiguous character of physical reality as well as the Berlin School filmmakers' aspiration to find 'appropriate' modes of representation also played a significant role in the two subsequent chapters. In chapter 4, I took Kracauer's claim for cinema's purely external qualities, its clinging to the object world, as a starting point for an analysis of Berlin School cinema's approaches to the human being. As I showed in my film analyses, the protagonists are presented as opaque strangers whom we are allowed to we are only get to know to a certain extent. This strangeness (or ambiguity) around human characters is achieved by a combination of strategies, including a restrained performance mode, the strong reduction of speech and the near absence of facial close-ups. By these means, Berlin School films withhold psychological identification with human figures; we are therefore thrown back on their rather ambiguous corporeality.

In the final chapter, I drew attention to the importance of the spatial environment in Berlin School films. Two further aspects of *Theory of Film* served as the starting point for discussion: first, Kracauer's preoccupation with non-dramatic and peripheral elements in narrative cinema and, second, his emphasis on the medium's potential to render our familiar surroundings unfamiliar. I have shown how Berlin School cinema's tendency to de-dramatisation and observation favours the integration of such elements without a (clear) narrative function. This is particularly true with regard to the

films' extensive inspection of the spatial surroundings. As I moreover demonstrated, the spaces habitually displayed in Berlin School cinema are of rather quotidian and often unidentifiable nature (indeed they can be described, with reference to Marc Augé, as non-places). These locations and areas, which are part of our everyday experiences but are less often represented in cinema, possess a strange familiarity, an effect which not only results from the spaces' anonymous character but also from the way in which they are filmed. As I suggested, Berlin School films provide us with fragments of spatial reality rather than the world as a whole. As a result of an absence of landmarks and rather narrow framings, the spatial environment maintains a degree of (non-sinister) mysteriousness, akin to the films' ambiguity around the human figures. In this way, the films reveal the unfamiliar in the familiar of our present-day surroundings.

These contemporary settings, however, have vanished from some of the latest films made by Berlin School directors. Thomas Arslan presented with *Gold* (2013) an austere western about German gold prospectors in the Canadian wilderness. Likewise, Christian Petzold's two most recent theatrical releases, *Barbara* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014), are both set in the past, a (North-)East German town in the early 1980s and post-war Berlin in ruins (both morally and literally), respectively.[595] Whatever one might think about Petzold's orientation towards the country's past (which could be understood as a form of counter-historiography, addressed as much to the present as to the past), it means a (temporary) departure from the stories set in the here and now of reunified Germany that have been the core of Berlin School cinema.

Over the last few years, we can observe, moreover, a greater aesthetic differentiation of the individual approaches by filmmakers associated with the Berlin School, some of whom have (recently) worked with established genres (or genre elements) such as westerns (Arslan), thrillers (Arslan, Hochhäusler, Petzold), melodramas (Petzold) and comedies (Ade, Heisenberg). For the reasons mentioned above, Christoph Hochhäusler has suggested that the validity of the classification 'Berlin

[595] Even though his sophisticated costume dramas should not be lumped together with the many German post-reunification 'blockbusters' about National socialism or the GDR (the Stasi), it bears a certain irony that precisely a costume film like *Barbara* has been by far Petzold's commercially most successful feature to date. Back in 2005, Petzold stated that he "weiß gar nicht, wie man historische Stoffe dreht—eine Kutsche oder auch einen Nazi filmen." Christian Petzold in Rüdiger Suchsland, "'Ein Roman hält uns heute nicht mehr zusammen': Interview mit Christian Petzold," *Artechock*, February 10, 2005, http://www.artechock.de/film/text/interview/p/petzold_2005.htm.

School,' invented by critics in the early 2000s and always being seen rather critically by most of the filmmakers, has come to an ultimate end:

> "The Berlin School" is a critic's label. Originally coined to describe the cinema of Arslan, Petzold, and Schanelec, it gradually came to encompass a great many other directors, including me. Because each critic counts differently and identifies different stylistic features as typical, various subsets have been identified. It is important to recognize that such designations fail to fully accommodate all its "members" and their works. That was true ten years ago, and it even truer now. Every label carries an expiration date, and to my mind this one has passed. The films of the last few years have veered further and further apart. Genre and costume films, comedies, and thrillers have tended more and more to defy expectations, a development that I find both necessary and liberating. School is out, and I am eager to see what comes next.[596]

Hochhäusler's statement from 2013 seems to be even more accurate today. Considering the latest releases from Berlin School directors—Hochhäusler's *Die Lügen der Sieger* (*The Lies of the Victors*, 2014), the director's second thriller about deceptive practices in the economic sphere after *Unter dir die Stadt*; Christian Petzold's contributions to the TV crime series *Polizeiruf* 110 (*Kreise* [2015] and *Wölfe* [2016], a third film is in preparation); and Maren Ade's unexpected success comedy (or rather, comedic father-daughter drama) *Toni Erdmann* (2016)—, the differences between their always distinctive works have certainly become more obvious.

In view of the Berlin School director's openness towards historical subject matters and genre frameworks, the question arises how a Kracauerian reading of these films might look. In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer's attitude to history films and genre becomes apparent both explicitly and implicitly. Films with historical subjects are disapproved of particularly for their contradicting of the medium's affinity with the unstaged (one of cinema's major differences to the theatre). For Kracauer, period films fundamentally disregard this affinity, as the reconstruction of bygone times by means of costumes, props and décor is necessarily theatrical. "Unlike the immediate past," Kracauer writes, "the historical past must be staged in terms of costumes and settings completely estranged from present-day life. Consequently, it is inevitable that any moviegoer susceptible to the medium should feel uneasy about the irrevocable staginess."[597] Kracauer's 'unease' with staginess results from a concern with its negative effects for the medium's redemptive potential. As he suggests, the camera's capacity to

[596] Hochhäusler, "On Whose Shoulders," 28.
[597] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 77.

register all details exposes the artificiality and anachronism of historical films (modern-day actors in ancient dresses and décors), and in so doing, hampers the spectator's imaginative encounter with the material phenomena on screen.

In fact, the paradoxes of the costume film can still be observed nowadays, including in the afore-mentioned films by Arslan and Petzold (though the frictions caused by these inconsistencies might be partly intended/welcomed by the directors as an anti-illusionary element). Kracauer's notion of unstaged reality, however, should not be understood as a plea for verisimilitude; rather, it emphasises the importance of 'authentic' settings—the *seemingly* unstaged—as a precondition for the indeterminate and infinite quality of the filmic experience, and is thus not opposed to the medium's constructedness (which also applies to other inherent affinities such as the fortuitous or endlessness); otherwise, highly stylised films like Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931) or Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) would not be praised by Kracauer for their engagement with the material world.

While costume films are criticised in *Theory of Film* for their profound estrangement from present-day life, the matter of genre appears quite differently. Throughout the book, Kracauer highlights manifestations of what he sees as 'cinematic' attitudes to the physical world in various distinctive approaches and genres, reaching from Italian Neorealist films to American silent comedies, from D. W. Griffith's epics to Alfred Hitchcock's suspense movies, from melodramas to musicals. Indeed, the central question for Kracauer is how films make use of the peculiar possibilities of the medium, namely to provide novel and suggestive experiences of the material world. Therefore, despite melodrama's rootedness in the theatrical story, he emphasises the genre's potential, arguing that "[t]he sensational incidents which melodrama emphasizes reach deep into the physical world and go together with a plot too loose or crude to affect the relative autonomy of its parts."[598] In a similar vein, Kracauer advocates Hitchcock's thrillers as they, in a particular fashion, "culminate in material things and occurrences which, besides being traces of a crime and offering clues to the identity of the criminal, are pregnant with both external and internal life […]—these poignant configurations of camera-life have an individuality and a glamour all their own; they spur our imagination, attuning it to the tales still half-enshrined in them."[599] The genre is particularly suitable

[598] Ibid., 272.
[599] Ibid., 277.

for Hitchcock's approach, Kracauer argues, since thrillers "precisely because of their insignificance […] permit him to highlight […] moments of photographable reality without any regard for the obligations which intrigues with substantive issues might impose upon him."[600]

As we can see, from Kracauer's perspective there is a fundamental difference between historical films and genre frameworks with regard to their potential for experiences of the present-day world. Therefore, even if one can find evidence of the Berlin School directors' attentiveness to the physical world also in their films with historical subjects—consider, for instance, the impact of the deserted landscapes in Arslan's *Gold* or the amplified sounds of the wind in Petzold's *Barbara*—, they seem less compatible, for the reasons presented above, with the general approach of this study. The employment of genre elements, on the other hand, does not stand in contrast to Kracauer's emphasis on material redemption. Thus, central features of Arslan's *Im Schatten* or Petzold's *Jerichow*, both of which I originally considered in my selection of key films, would have been equally relevant to the discussions of chapters 3 to 5.

In this thesis, I have argued very strongly for the ongoing relevance of Kracauer's material aesthetics, speculating on the applicability of *Theory of Film*'s central argument about cinema's redemptive potential to contemporary realist cinema. My choice of films has been extremely selective, with the aim of providing a range of distinctive approaches by individual directors with a shared attentiveness to the material world. But I believe that this study has benefited from the intensive engagement with the selected films. Its main purpose has been to show how Kracauer's notion of material redemption can offer new and productive ways of thinking through realist tendencies in present-day cinema, and particularly how current films may open up possibilities for novel and suggestive experiences of the world we live in.

There is, of course, no clear-cut definition of realism, or material realism, as I have chosen to call the approaches by Berlin School directors in this thesis (somehow analogous to Kracauer's term material aesthetics); as an aesthetic practice, realism is always in negotiation and flux, thus varying geographically and historically. I hope this thesis will therefore prompt further attempts to apply Kracauer's reflections on cinema to film(maker)s from different countries and continents, other stylistic movements and

[600] Ibid.

schools. Future enquiries into the contemporaneity of Kracauer's conception of the medium could examine, moreover, the current possibilities and necessities for cinematic experiences of the material world, not only in relation to the medium's technological changes but, more generally, with regard to the modern human condition and our present relationship with (moving) images, a concern equivalent to that highlighted in the epilogue to Kracauer's book, entitled "Film in Our Time."

It is possible, though, that Kracauer would have disapproved of at least some of the Berlin School films (or aspects of the films) I have discussed in this study. The publication of *Theory of Film* in 1960 coincided with significant developments in modern cinema including the birth of the French New Wave and the premiere of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. While Kracauer examines selected films from the beginning of the medium to the late 1950s (with a core focus on the 1920s to the 1940s), we can only speculate on his attitude to new cinematic approaches from the late 1950s onwards. For Thomas Elsaesser, Kracauer can be considered an early advocate of modern cinema, suggesting that his notion of the fortuitous, the indeterminate and the flow of life "can also be taken programmatically as a covert manifesto anticipating Deleuze's cinema of the 'time-image' […],"[601] a conception discussed in chapter 3 of this study. In Elsaesser's view, Kracauer's affinities can be related to the indeterminacy of both material phenomena and the storyline in Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. In addition to Antonioni's landmark film, he refers to Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*, 1961). While I concur with Elsaesser's first suggestion, the association with Resnais's literary approach is rather problematic, not least because we have evidence of Kracauer's strong disapproval; in letters to Theodor W. Adorno, he harshly condemned Resnais's film as "eine Ausgeburt von Langeweile"[602] from a "would-be-artist."[603] While Kracauer's plea for an 'artless' cinema "does not imply that camera-realism and art exclude each other,"[604] he criticises filmmakers whose creative arrangements divert the films from an engagement with the material world.

Even though my application of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* to Berlin School cinema can therefore only be of speculative nature, I hope to have demonstrated throughout this thesis that the selected films provide us with ambiguous and imaginative

[601] Elsaesser, "Siegfried Kracauer's Affinities," 13.
[602] Siegfried Kracauer in Adorno and Kracauer, *Briefwechsel*, 705.
[603] Siegfried Kracauer in ibid., 692.
[604] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 302.

experiences of the visible and audible world, in a way that is closely related to Kracauer's notion of the medium's redemptive potential. This indeterminate character manifests itself, moreover, in the open endings of many Berlin School films, a feature which can be observed exemplarily in Angela Schanelec's *Marseille*. In the film's final shot, taken at the beach, the female protagonist is displayed in the far background; she is only discernible because of her yellow dress, and otherwise almost becomes one with the spatial environment (Fig. 34). On the soundtrack, we hear the waves of the sea. A cut, a black image; this is how the film ends. The journey continues in the spectator's imagination.

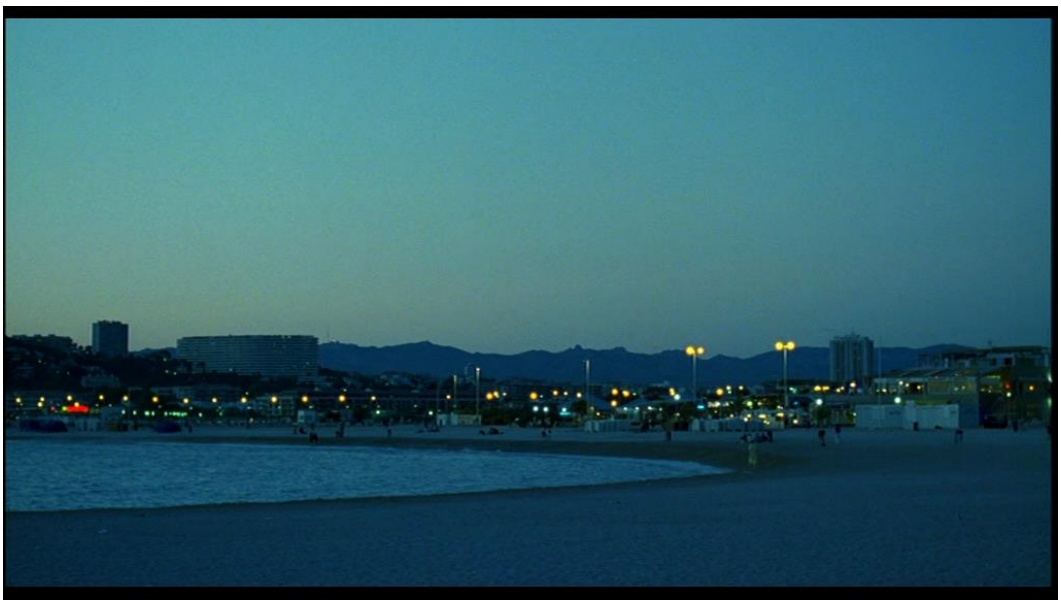

FIGURE 34: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

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